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Pursuing the Way

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YOUNG MEN; FAULTS AND IDEALS.

Thomas Y. Crowell & Company

New York

Finding the Way

BY
J. R. MILLER, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "SILENT TIMES," "UPPER CURRENTS,"
"LESSONS OF LOVE," "IN PERFECT PEACE," ETC.

*"I go to prove my soul;
I see my way as birds their trackless path,
I shall arrive!*

*In good time, in His good time, I shall arrive.
He guides me and the bird. In his good time."*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

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PREFACE

THE *little books of this "Silent Times" series* have been a great comfort to the author in that they have proved helpful to many people in all parts of the world. Letters come continually from those who have been strengthened or encouraged by them. This new volume is sent out in the hope that it, too, may carry cheer and inspiration to those who may read it. The sweetest joy of earth comes from the privilege of being used by the Master in helping others to live a little more hopefully, victoriously and usefully.

J. R. M.

Philadelphia, U. S. A.

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Finding the Way

*“Among so many, can he care?
Can special love be everywhere?”
I asked. “My soul bethought of this,—
In just that very place of his
Where he hath put and keepeth you
God hath no other thing to do.”*

CHAPTER FIRST

Finding the Way



DOES God condescend to show people the way through this world? He guides suns and planets in their orbits, so that they never wander from their course. He directs them so carefully, so accurately, that in all the vast universe, with its millions of worlds and systems of worlds, there is absolute precision in all their movements, with no deviation, age after age. No star is ever too fast or too slow. No planet ever leaves its orbit. The sun is never late in rising. God has marked out paths for the worlds, and he causes them to move in these paths.

But does he interest himself in anything so small as the individual lives of men? Or, if he does give direction to the careers of great men who carry important destinies in their

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hands and are sent on missions of far-reaching responsibility, does he give thought to the daily paths of each one of the millions of his children? Does he show a little child the road through the tangles? Does he guide a wandering one home? There is no doubt about the teaching of the Bible on this subject. For example, we are told that God is our Father. What are the qualities of fatherhood? What is human fatherhood? Is there anything in the lives of children so small that their father is not interested in it? Is God, then, less kind than human parents? Browning puts the question thus:

*Do I find love so full in my nature, God's ultimate gift,
That I doubt his own love can compete with it?*

Here, the parts shift?

*Here, the creature surpass the Creator—the end, what
began?*

Think, too, of the interest of Christ in us, as proved by what he has done for us. He came to earth and endured our mortal life, that he might learn the way by experience.

Finding the Way

To us the path of each day is always new—we have not passed this way heretofore and we cannot tell what any hour may bring to us. But he knows all the way, for he went over every inch of it. There is no human experience which Christ does not understand. No suffering can be ours which he did not feel. No wrong can hurt us, but he was hurt far more sorely. Is the burden heavy? His burden was infinitely heavier, for he took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses, and bowed beneath the load of our sins. There is no phase of struggle, of suffering, of pain, of temptation, or of joy, with which he is unfamiliar. And knowing thus the way, from having sought it out for himself, he is able to guide us in it.

We have a right, therefore, to make the prayer: "Cause me to know the way wherein I should walk." Our prayer will be answered, too. There will be a hand extended to guide us, to open the path for us, and to help us over the hard pinches of the road.

But do we really need guidance? Are we not

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wise enough to decide what course it is best for us to take? Can we not find our own way in this world? Some people think they can, and they disdain to turn even to God for direction. They think they can get along without him, so they make no prayer for direction, but follow the light of their own wisdom. No wonder they never find the way home. There is a story of a tourist in the Alps, who refused a guide. He said he could find the way himself. So he went out alone in the morning, but he never came back. Life in this world is far more perilous than mountain climbing.

There are particular times, also, when we need to make the prayer for direction with special earnestness. There are times when every star seems to have gone out, and when clouds and darkness appear to have gathered about us, hiding every waymark, so that we cannot see any way out of the gloom and perplexity. We need then to have God's direction, or we shall perish. In the darkest hour of Christ's life, when he could not see

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even his Father's face, and cried out like one forsaken, he still kept his faith in God firm and strong. It was still, "My God, my God." But while there are times when we need guidance in an unusual way, there is no day in all our brightest year when we do not need it, when we dare to go forward one step without it. The day we do not seek and obtain God's leading will be a day of disaster for us. The day we go forth without prayer for divine blessing, when we do not lay our hand in Christ's as we go out into the great world, is a day of peril for us.

Indeed, we often need the divine guidance the most when we think we do not need it at all. On the other hand, it is often true that the experiences we dread, in which we seem to be left without help, when the darkness appears most dense about us and we cannot see the way, even a step, before us, are really full-est of God. We cry out then for deliverance, not knowing that it is God who is leading us into the shadows. It is when the sun goes down that we see the stars. Ofttimes it is

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when the light of human love is quenched that the face of Christ is first really revealed, or revealed as never before. We cry, "Show me the way," thinking that we have lost the way, and crying to be led back into it, when lo! the clouds part and we see Christ close beside us, and know that he has been beside us all the time.

*"And that thou sayest, 'Go,'
Our hearts are glad; for he is still thy friend,
And best loved of all, whom thou dost send
The farthest from thee: this thy servants know.
Oh, send by whom thou wilt, for they are blest
Who go thine errands. Not upon thy breast
We learn thy secrets. Long beside thy tomb
We wept, and lingered in the garden gloom;
And oft we sought thee in thy house of prayer
And in the desert, yet thou wast not there:
But as we journeyed sadly through a place
Obscure and mean, we lighted on the trace
Of thy fresh footprints, and a whisper clear
Fell on our spirits—thou thyself wast near;
And from thy servants' hearts thy name adored
Broke forth in fire; we said, 'It is the Lord.'"*

Finding the Way

God's way does not always lie in the sunshine; sometimes it runs into deep glooms. We are not always out of the way when we find ourselves facing obstacles and difficulties. When we cannot see where we are going, we may be in the way everlasting, because God is guiding us. He leads us away many a time from the path we would have taken. Always he leads us away from whatever is wrong. God's way is a way of holiness, a white, clean way. It is the road to heaven.

When we pray for guidance we must surrender our will to God. If we ask him to guide us, we must let him do it; we must yield our own preference and accept his. For example, we think we should always be active in some kind of service for our Master. Then one day we are called into a sick room and have to stay there for a month. We think the time is lost, because in it we have done no work, helped no one, relieved no distress, spoken no word of cheer or comfort. What is the compensation for this loss of time in doing good, this missing of opportunities for serv-

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ing others? We cannot tell, but we know at least that God's will does not call us always to activity; sometimes they serve best "who only stand and wait." We are in this world not only to do a great deal of good, but also to grow into the likeness of Christ. If then in any certain weeks we are not permitted to do any kindnesses, but if, meanwhile, we have been growing a little more patient, gentle, thoughtful, humble, if the peace of our hearts has become a little deeper, quieter, sweeter, the time has not been lost.

Always when we pray to be guided we must take God's way wherever it may lead us; we must let God decide whether we shall work or rest. One writes: "No time of seeming inactivity is laid upon you by God without a just reason. It is God calling upon you to do his business by ripening in quiet all your powers for some high sphere of activity which is about to be opened to you." We are doing God's work not only when we are pressing forward in eager haste to accomplish some achievement for him, but quite as much

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when we are keeping still and allowing God to work in us, enriching and beautifying our lives.

The way of God which he would make us know is always the way of his will. The one business of life is to learn to do that will. We say it lightly in our prayers, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." If our prayer is answered our whole life will be drawn into the divine way. What effect, for example, will God's way have on our grudges, our unbrotherly feelings, our jealousies, our resentments, our selfishnesses? They must all come into tune with the law of love. So in all life. The way on which God guides us is a way of holiness. It is an ever-ascending way, for its terminal is heaven. It is a prayer, therefore, that we must make continually. We must always keep climbing upward. No matter how good you are to-day, you should be somewhat better to-morrow.

All of us know the way better than we follow it. None of us are as good as our ideals. Knowing the way is not enough—we must

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walk in it. "If ye know these things," said the Master, "happy are ye if ye do them." We must remember, too, that the divine guidance is not merely for the spiritual part of our life—for Sundays, for religious exercises—it is for the week-days as well, and for all the common paths. Our prayer is that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are to follow the laws of heaven in our earthly affairs, in our business, in our social life, in our friendships, in all of our conduct.

We need never doubt that God's way leads always to the best things, to the truest and to the most real good. Let no one ever think that the way of the Lord is a mistake, however disappointing to our hopes and schemes it may be. One day we shall know that every divine leading, whatever it may have cost us to follow it, is wise and good. When we insist on our own way instead of God's, we are always making a mistake, the end of which will be sorrow and hurt.

Learning God's Will

*I lie where I have always lain,
God smiles as he has always smiled;
Ere suns and moons could wax and wane,
Ere stars were thundergirt, or piled
The heavens, God thought on me his child;
Ordained a life for me, arrayed
Its circumstances every one
To the minutest.*

—ROBERT BROWNING.

CHAPTER SECOND

Learning God's Will



WE talk much about being led. If we are not led by one who knows the way, we never can get home, for we never can find the way ourselves. How are we led? How can we know what the divine leading is? We cannot hear God speaking to us, nor can we see him going before us to show us the way. How then can we learn what his will is for us? How can we have him show us the way?

For one thing, we are quite sure that God desires to lead us. His guidance includes not only our daily steps, but also the shaping of our circumstances and affairs. We cannot be thankful enough that our lives are in God's hands, for we never could care for them ourselves. One writes :

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*“I would not dare, though it were offered me,
To plan my lot for but a single day,
So sure am I that all my life would be
Marked with sad blots in token of my sway.”*

There is no chance in this world. Every drop of water in the wild waves, in the most terrific storm is controlled by law, and God is back of the law. In these days, with their wonderful advance in science, some good people are asking if there is any use in praying, for example, for the sick, for favorable weather, for the safety of the ship that bears loved ones of theirs on the sea, or for the staying of the epidemic. It seems to them that all things are under fixed laws with which no prayer can interfere. How then can God lead each one of his children in any ways save according to the fixed and unalterable laws of the universe? We need not try to answer this question, but we may say that God would not be God if he were in such bondage to the laws of his own world that he could not hear the cry of a child for help, and answer it, or if he

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could not open a way for you out of the greatest difficulties.

So we need not vex ourselves with the question, how God can lead us and direct our paths. We may leave that to him, for he is infinitely greater than all the things he has made. He is able to ward off dangers, that none of them can touch us. This is God's world and God is our Father. His name is love, which means that love is the essential quality of his character. Do you think since God's power is so great, and his law so unalterable, that his love has no liberty of action? Believe it not. God can do what his heart longs to do for us. He can lead us in the way in which he would have us go.

*“O import deep as life is, deep as time
There is a Something sacred and sublime
Moving behind the worlds, beyond our ken,
Weighing the stars, weighing the deeds of men.”*

*“Take heart, O soul of sorrow, and be strong;
There is One greater than the whole world's wrong.
Be hushed before the high, benignant Power
That goes untarrying to the reckoning hour.”*

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God's leading, however, does not remove the necessity for thought and effort on our part. He does not lead us by compulsion, without choice or exertion of our own. We have something to do with the working out of the will of God for ourselves. God is never to be left out of anything; he is always to be consulted. We pray, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven," but it is we who must do this will—God will not coerce us into doing it, nor will he do it for us. We are to take God's way instead of our own, but his will must work through our wills. Our wills are not to be crushed, broken, as sometimes we are told—they are to be merged in Christ's, voluntarily brought into accord with his will, so that we shall do gladly and heartily what he wills for us to do. "Our wills are ours to make them thine." God never does anything for us that we can do for ourselves. He has given us brains, and he does not mean to think for us. He has given us judgment, and we are to decide matters for ourselves. He does not carry us along—he leads us through our

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own willingness, our obedience, our aspirations, our choices, our ventures of faith.

God's leading includes divine providence. There are many examples of this in the Bible, but the story of Joseph is one of the plainest and most remarkable. In his youth, Joseph was cruelly sinned against. The envy of his brothers tore him away from his home, and we see him carried off as a slave to a strange land. Why did not God interfere and prevent this crime? He could have done it, if he is God. Did he not love Joseph? Yes. Why, then, did he permit such terrible wrong to be done to this gentle boy? Just because he loved him.

Edward Everett Hale, in a story, fancies that Joseph had escaped during his first night with the caravan and was starting homeward. Then a yellow dog barked and aroused his keepers, who followed him and brought him back. Could not God have kept the dog from barking and thus have let the boy get home to his father? Would not that have been the truest kindness?

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But the writer of the story shows us what would have been the consequences of Joseph's escaping that night. A number of years later, when the famine came on, there would have been no storehouses filled with food, and Egypt would have been destroyed. The Hebrews in Canaan would have perished, there would have been no chosen family, the history of the ancient world would have been changed and civilization would have been set back centuries—all because a yellow dog was kept from barking and a cruelly wronged boy was in kindness allowed to escape and get home. So we see it was in wise, far-seeing love that God did not interfere to save this Hebrew lad from the wickedness of his brothers. He used the evil of men to lead Joseph through all his hard training and discipline, to prepare him for the great work he was to do when he became a man.

If we would be led by God we must submit to his providences, when they clearly interpret his will. Not always, however, are hindrances meant to hinder; often they are meant to be

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overcome, in order that in the overcoming we may grow strong. But when there are obstacles which cannot be removed, they are to be accepted as the waymarks of divine guidance. Whatever in our lot is inevitable we must regard as indicative of God's will for us, showing us gates closed against us, and other gates opening out upon ways in which we must walk.

How we may interpret Providence and decide in all cases what the will of God for us is, are questions which many find it hard to answer. Some people have a habit of opening the Bible at random when they are trying to decide some important question of duty, and then taking the first word they come upon as the answer to their question. But this is not a sane or scriptural way of getting divine guidance. Bible texts are not meant to be used as dice in playing games of chance.

If we would learn what God's will for us in life's common affairs is, we should always keep near to Christ, so near that we can speak

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to him any moment, ask him any question, and let our hand rest in his. He always finds some way of making his will known to those who thus trust him and look to him for direction.

Then if we would have divine guidance, we must be willing to accept it when it comes to us. We must be willing to be led, and must be ready to go wherever our Lord would have us go. Ofttimes the reason we do not get guidance is because we are not willing to take God's way when we know it. Elizabeth Fry at the age of sixty-five, said that from the time her heart was touched by the divine Spirit, when she was seventeen, she had never awakened from sleep, in sickness or in health, but that her first waking thought was, how best she might serve her Lord. She sought always to be led by him in paths of service of his own choosing. The outcome of such devotion to the divine will was a life full of beautiful ministry. The prisons of all the civilized world felt the impress of her noble life. A young girl who will thus seek the

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divine guidance, and promptly and unquestioningly accept it, cannot know to what beauty of character and what splendor of usefulness she will be led in the end.

We are to pray to be divinely led not only in large matters, but in the smallest—every hour, every moment. “Order my steps,” is a prayer in one of the Psalms. How it would change all life for us if we would continually pray thus! You will have some hard thing to do to-morrow, an uncongenial and distasteful task. You will not want to do it. But it is God's will and that makes it a radiant deed, like holiest service of angel before God's throne. You will have to endure something hard or humiliating, to-morrow—some unjust treatment, some unkindness. Your nature will revolt. “I cannot do that,” you will say. But it is God's will that you should endure it, and endure it sweetly, patiently, songfully, and that changes it for you—it is a glorious thing to do God's will.

We will always find God's will for us by always doing the next thing. No matter how

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small it is, it will take us a step forward in God's way. Doing his will in little things will show us other steps to take and thus will lead us on till all the way has been passed over. The word of God is said to be a lamp unto our feet—not a great sun shining high in the heavens, illumining a hemisphere, but a little lantern that we may carry in our hand and hold so that its light shall fall on the bit of road on which we are walking. It will not lighten a whole mile for us at a time, but it will always make the next step clear, and as we take that, the next one, and so on, until all the miles of our journey have been shown to us.

If only we will do the will of God, as it is made known to us, little by little, moment by moment, we shall be led step by step, and at last shall reach home.

*“O Master, point thou out the way,
Nor suffer thou our steps to stray;
Then in the path that leads to-day
We follow thee.*

Learning God's Will

*“Thou hast passed on before our face ;
Thy footsteps on the way we trace ;
O keep us, aid us by thy grace ;
We follow thee.”*

God's Silences to Us

*"I will be silent in my soul,
Since God has girt me round
With his own Silences, in which
There is no space for Sound.
Only his voice, perchance, may drop
Like dew upon the ground.*

*"I will be silent, and will lean
Myself into all space.
Love, didst thou think in all this life
That thou couldst touch my face?
Nay, for God bade that I should turn
Unto himself for space."*

CHAPTER THIRD

God's Silences to Us



ONE of the most remarkable incidents in the Gospels is that in which, to a poor woman's cries for help, Jesus answered not a word. He kept his face turned away, and seemed to treat the suppliant with cold indifference. Yet he was not indifferent. In his heart was warm compassion for her, and in the end he gave her far more than she had asked.

There are times when God seems to be silent to us. To our earnest supplications he answers not a word. We are told to ask and we shall receive, to seek and we shall find, to knock and it shall be opened unto us. Yet there come times when, though we ask most imploringly, we seem not to receive; when, though we seek with intensest earnestness, we seem not to find; when, though we knock until our

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hands are bruised and bleeding, there seems to be no opening of the door. Sometimes the heavens appear to be brass above us as we cry. Is there anywhere an ear to hear, or a heart to feel sympathy with us in our need?

Nothing else is so awful as the silence of God. It is a pathetic prayer in which a psalm-writer pleads, "Be not silent to me; lest I become like them that go down into the pit." Anything from God is better than that he be silent to us. It would be a sad, dreary, lonely world if the atheist's creed were true, that there is no God, that there is no ear to hear prayer, that no voice of answering love or comfort or help ever comes out of the heavens to us.

Do prayers of faith ever remain really unanswered? There are prayers which are answered, although we do not know it, thinking them still unanswered. The answer is not recognized when it comes; the blessing comes and is not perceived. This is true especially of many spiritual blessings which we seek. We ask for holiness, yet as the days pass it

God's Silences to Us

does not seem to us that we are growing in holiness. Yet, perhaps, all the while our spirit is imperceptibly, unconsciously imbibing more and more of the mind of Christ, and we are being changed into his image. We expect the answer in a certain way—in a manifestation which we cannot mistake, while it comes to us silently, as the dew comes upon the drooping flowers and the withering leaves. But, like the flowers and the leaves, our souls are refreshed and our life is renewed.

We put our cares into God's hands, with a prayer that he will free us from the load. But the cares do not seem to become any less. We think there has been no answer to our prayer. Yet all the while an unseen hand has been shaping, adjusting, disentangling the complex affairs of our life, and preparing a blessing for us out of them all. We are not conscious of it, but our prayer has been receiving continual answer. Like the tapestry weavers, we have not seen the unfolding of the pattern as we have wrought away in the darkness, and yet on the other side, where God's

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eye sees, it has been coming out in beauty. Some day we shall know that many prayers we now think unanswered have really been most graciously answered.

There are prayers, however, which are not answered. For example, we ask God to lift away our burden. He hears our pleading and his heart is warm with love; yet, to do this would be to rob us of blessings which can come to us only through the bearing of the burden. There are mistaken notions current among good people about the way God helps. Some think that whenever they have a little trouble, a bit of hard path to walk over, a load to carry, a sorrow to meet, a trial of any kind, all they have to do is to call upon God and he will take away that which is hard, or prevent that which impends, freeing them altogether from the trial. But this is not God's usual way. His purpose concerning us is not to make things easy for us, but rather to make something of us. So when we ask him to save us from our care, to take the struggle out of our life, to make the path

God's Silences to Us

mossy for our feet, to lift off the heavy load, he simply does not do it. It really would be most unkind and unloving in him to do so. It would be giving us an easier path to-day instead of a mountain vision to-morrow. Therefore, prayers of this kind go unanswered. We must carry the burden ourselves. We must climb the steep path to stand on the radiant peak. God wants us to learn life's lessons, and to do this we must be left to work out the problems for ourselves.

There are rich blessings that we can get only through sorrow. It would be a short-sighted love, therefore, that would heed our cries for deliverance and spare us from sorrow because we desired it, thus depriving us of blessings which God intends to send to us in the sorrow, and which can come to us in no other way.

*"If loving hearts were never lonely,
If all things wished might always be,
Accepting what they looked for only,
They might be glad, but not in thee.*

Finding the Way

*"We need as much the cross we bear
As air we breathe, as light we see;
It draws us to thy side in prayer,
It bends us to our strength in thee."*

A child may indolently shrink from the study, the regular hours, the routine, the tasks and drudgery and discipline of the school, and beg the parent to let him stay at home and have an easy time. But what would you think of the father who would weakly grant the child's request, releasing him from the tasks that irk him so? And is God less wisely kind than our human fathers? He will not answer prayers which ask that we may be freed from duty, from work, from struggle, since it is by these very things alone that we can grow. The only true answer to such prayers is the withholding of what we ask.

A man and his wife were talking together and this scrap of their conversation was overheard: "I could make a good living," said the man, "yes, more than a good living, by continuing to paint the sort of trash I've been painting all summer."

God's Silences to Us

“Yes,” said the woman, looking at him proudly, “but I want my husband to live up to his best. I would live in a garret, on a crust, cheerfully, to help him do it.”

That is the way God would have us live, so as to make the best of our life. When we pray for help to live easily and not up to our loftiest reaches of attainment and achievement, God will be silent to our request. He would not be our wise and loving Father, if he treated such requests differently.

There are selfish prayers, too, which go unanswered. “There are others.” Human lives are tied up together in relations. It is not enough that any of us shall think only of himself and his own things. Thoughts of others must intertwine with thoughts for ourselves. Something which might be good for us, if we were the only person, it may not be wise to grant because it might not be for the comfort and good of others. It might work them hurt, or at least add to their burdens. It is possible to overlook this in our prayers, and to press our interests and desires to the

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harming of our neighbor. God's eye takes in all his children, and he plans for the truest and best good of each one of them, even the least. Our selfish prayers, which, if granted, would work to the injury of others, he will not answer.

There is yet another class of prayers which appear to be unanswered, but whose answers are only delayed for wise reasons. Perhaps we are not able at the time to receive the things we ask for. A child in one of the lower grades in the school may go to a teacher of higher studies and ask to be taught this or that branch. The teacher may be willing to impart to the pupil this knowledge of higher things, but the pupil cannot receive it until he has gone through certain other studies to prepare himself for it. The higher music cannot be taught until the rudiments have been mastered. There are qualities for which we may pray, but which can be received only after certain discipline. A ripened character cannot be attained by a young Christian merely in answer to prayer—it can be reached only through long experience.

God's Silences to Us

These are suggestions of what appear to be unanswered prayers. They may have been answered and we did not recognize the things we sought when they came. Or, they may be, indeed, unanswered, because to answer them would not have been kindness to us. Or the answers may have been delayed until our hearts were made ready to receive them. We may always trust God with our prayers, even when the need seems to us most urgent. He is wiser than we, and his love for us never makes a mistake. He will do for us whatever is best, at the best time, and in the best way. Unanswered prayers are not unheard prayers. Every whisper of a child, every sigh of a sufferer in this world, goes up to God, and his heart is compassionate and loving, and what is best for us he will do.

Letting God In

*“Breathe on me, breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do.*

*“Breathe on me, breath of God,
Until my heart is pure;
Until with thee I will one will,
To do or to endure.*

*“Breathe on me, breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity.”*

CHAPTER FOURTH

Letting God In



THE teaching of Christianity is that God lives in us. On the day of Pentecost we are told that the disciples of Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian may be, should be, a Spirit-filled Christian. We say we are only dust, but we may receive the breath of God into our dust, and then our lives are glorified.

We often speak of someone coming into another's life, bringing new impulse, new inspiration, new visions of beauty, new ideals of character. Many a life is transformed by a rich human friendship. It means far more, however, to have God come into one's life, touching the springs of being with divinity. Yet that is what it is to be a Christian of the New Testament type—that is the privi-

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lege of everyone who believes in Christ. A Christian is not merely a man who belongs to a church, who accepts the doctrines of Christianity, and who lives a good life. He is a man in whom God lives.

The result of the divine indwelling is the renewal of the nature. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." A life that has been only earthly hitherto grows into blessed sainthood when God enters into it. Someone writes of a man who left flowers blooming about his home which but for him would never have bloomed. The Spirit leaves heavenly flowers blooming which but for his abiding in us would never have bloomed. Saint Paul tells us about these in a well-known passage: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control."

Religion is not a mere matter of emotion or devout feeling—it is a matter of life. The influence of the indwelling Spirit is not shown merely in holy raptures, in ecstatic experiences, but in most practical ways in every-

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day living. Jesus said very emphatically that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," is in the kingdom of heaven. Obedience, he said, is the test. He only is in the heavenly kingdom that doeth the will of the Father. Nothing pleases our Master but obedience. He says very little about emotion, but a great deal about obeying. His friends are known not by their loud professions of love and ardor, but by their doing whatsoever he commands them to do.

A very little love for our neighbor wrought out in a bit of every-day kindness, is worth a great deal of talk about love which finds no expression in act. To be kind and charitable, to give bread to the hungry, to deny one's self a pleasure in order to help another over a hard place, to go far out of one's way to be of use to another who is in need, are better evidences of the indwelling of the Spirit than any amount of effervescent talk about consecration in a prayer meeting. To be honest in business on Monday, to be a good, tidy and hospitable housekeeper on Tuesday, to

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pay one's debts on Wednesday, to be patient in enduring wrong on Thursday, is better proof of the Spirit's indwelling than a whole hour's rapturous experience on Sunday, which bears no fruit in the life. If God is in us, the world will know it without being told of it—it will see it in character, in disposition, in act, in service of love, in the diffusion of grace and goodness.

Here is a fragment from a genial writer: " 'Alice is not pretty,' said one of her friends, trying to define her character, 'and I never heard anybody call her brilliant; but you couldn't put her anywhere, in the poorest, narrowest place, without finding in a very little while that things had begun to grow about her. She could make a home in a desert, and not only would it be a home, with all the warm, welcoming feeling of one, but there would be fine, invisible lines stretching out from it to the world in every direction. I cannot imagine her in so poor a place that she could not find joy in it, nor in so lonely a place that the sorrowing and troubled would

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not find their way to her door. She has a gift for living—that's the secret.' ”

It is not easy to let God into our lives. It is easier to yield to the spirit of the world than to the divine Spirit. Yet if we knew what Christ could do with our poor lives, what beauty he could awaken in them, what blessings they would become if filled with his Spirit, what heavenly music they would give out if his hands struck their chords, we would welcome him and surrender ourselves altogether to him.

*“We are but organs mute, till the master touches the
keys;*

.
*Harps are we, silent harps, that have hung on
willow trees,*

*Dumb till our heartstrings swell and break with a
pulse divine.”*

It is not easy in this unspiritual world to keep the heavenly Guest in our heart day after day, year after year, to the end of life. Too many open to him on the Lord's day,

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and then on Monday let in again the old worldly guests who drive out the divine Spirit. We all know how easy it is to lose out of our hearts the gentle thoughts and holy desires and spiritual feelings which come to us in life's quiet, sacred moments. You sit down with your Bible in the pure, sweet morning, and as you read the Master's words it seems to you as if angels had come into your heart. You hear words of love spoken out of heaven in your ear. Desires kindled by the Spirit of God, desires for holy things, fill you. As you read and pray and meditate, it is as if you were sitting in the gate of heaven and hearing the songs of the holy beings gathered round God's throne.

But half an hour later, you must go out into the world where a thousand other voices will break upon your ears—voices of temptation, voices of pleasure, voices of care and fret, the calls of business, of friendship, of emotion—not all holy voices, many of them calling you away from God. How will you carry with you all the day, through all these distractions

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and all these allurements, the holy thoughts, feelings, and desires of the moments of devotion in the morning?

It is not easy to maintain the Sabbath peace in the midst of the strifes and competitions of the week-day life. It is not easy to take the blissful raptures of the holy communion out into the chill air of the streets, or to keep the glowing emotions of the hour of sacred prayer amid the influences of the shop or the factory. The messengers of heaven are shy and easily driven away, and we need to take most sedulous care lest they fly away and leave us.

*“Out of the deeps of heaven
A bird has flown to my door,
As twice in the ripening summers
Its mates have flown before.*

*“Why it has flown to my dwelling,
Nor it nor I may know,
And only the silent angels
Can tell me when it shall go.*

*“That it will not straightway vanish
But fold its wings with me,*

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*And sing in the greenest branches
Till the axe is laid to the tree,
"Is the prayer of my love and terror;
For my soul is sore distressed,
Lest I wake some dreadful morning,
And find but its empty nest."*

There are urgent warnings in the Scriptures against the danger of losing the divine abiding. We are exhorted not to grieve the Holy Spirit. There are many ways of grieving a friend. We may do it by unkindness, by indifference, by lack of hospitality. Jesus was a frequent guest in a home at Bethany, and found rest, comfort, and the refreshment of love there. It must have been a home of gentleness and peace, or he would not have entered its doors so often, nor found such gladness there. We cannot think of it as being such a refuge and place of rest to him if its atmosphere had been one of bitterness and strife.

A little Welsh girl went into a worldly home as a servant. All her life she had been used, in her own home, to godly ways—family pray-

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ers, grace at meals, reverence for God, love, kindness. In this home where she was employed, all this was wanting. There was no prayer, no reverence, no love—instead there was profanity, bitterness, strife, heaven-daring sin. After one night, the little maid told her mistress that she could not stay—she was afraid to stay where God was not a guest. If we would keep the heavenly Guest in our heart, we must make a home of love there for him, with an atmosphere kindly and congenial. In a prayerless, loveless heart the heavenly Guest will not stay.

We are exhorted also not to quench the Spirit. The figure is of a fire burning within us, which we are in danger of putting out. There are many things that tend to quench the flame of divine love in a heart. Sin always does it. Anger, sensuality, pride, quench the holy flame. Worldliness in feeling and desire produce an atmosphere in which the spirit of holiness cannot dwell. Fire must have air in which to burn, and only an atmosphere of love and humility will nourish this sacred flame.

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It will be a sad thing if the fire of heaven burning in our hearts should be allowed to go out. A writer tells of a conservatory which he saw one morning: "One bitter night the gardener neglected the fire, and what havoc was wrought! The leaves were black, everything drooped, the rare blossoms would bloom no more. For a few hours the fire was neglected and the floral treasures were frost-bitten beyond redemption." So will it be in any human life when the heavenly fire is quenched or allowed to go out. All the beauty will be left in ruin.

We cannot guard our spiritual life too carefully. God is infinitely patient. He is not easily driven away. He loves unto the uttermost. But we can keep the divine joy in our hearts only by maintaining there always an atmosphere of joy. The angel of peace will abide only where he is welcomed by a son of peace within.

The Sympathy of Christ

*“To him who hears I whisper all;
And softer than the dews of heaven
The tears of Christ’s compassion fall;
I know I am forgiven.*

*“Wrapped in the peace that follows prayer
I fold my hands in perfect trust,
Forgetful of the cross I bear
Through noonday heat and dust.*

*“No more life’s mysteries vex my thought;
No cruel doubts disturb my breast;
My heavy-laden spirit sought
And found the promised rest.”*

CHAPTER FIFTH

The Sympathy of Christ



THE gospel story of Christ closes with the account of his ascension. He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Was that the end of his interest in this world? Does he think of us up there in his glory? Does he know anything of us down here in our struggles, our toils, our cares, and our sorrows? Is he interested in our lives in this world—in our joys and griefs, in our hopes and fears?

The answer to these questions is that in heaven he is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He sympathizes with us in all the experiences of our lives. The word sympathy means suffering with. If two musical instruments, standing near each other, are tuned to the same key, and a performer plays on one

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of them, the chords of the other respond, too, as if invisible fingers were playing the same music on the strings. When two friends are side by side, and one of them is passing through an experience of either joy or pain, the other shares the experience. So Christ in heaven sympathizes with his friends on the earth in their experiences, and is instantly touched with the feeling of their gladness and their grief.

We believe all this as a doctrine, but what meaning has it for us in our own lives? What is Christ in heaven to us in a personal, practical way? If the truth of the sympathy of Christ becomes real in our experience, it will bring great strength and inspiration to us. We are helped in times of weakness or suffering by the consciousness that human friends are thinking of us and sharing our trouble. Immeasurably greater is the help which it gives us to know that Christ in heaven is touched by our pain and feels with us.

If we were really conscious that Christ cares, feels with us, is actually interested in our

The Sympathy of Christ

large and small affairs, it would change the meaning of all life for us.

*“If I could only surely know
That all the things that tire me so
Were noticed by my Lord—
The pang that cuts me like a knife,
The lesser pains of daily strife—
What peace it would afford !*

*“I wonder if he really shares
In all these little human cares,
This mighty King of kings;
If he who guides through boundless space
Each blazing planet in its place
Can have the condescending grace
To mind these petty things.*

*“It seems to me, if sure of this,
Blent with each ill would come such bliss
That I might covet pain,
And deem whatever brought to me
The loving thought of Deity
And sense of Christ’s sweet sympathy,
Not loss, but richest gain.*

*“Dear Lord, my heart shall no more doubt
That thou dost compass me about
With sympathy divine:*

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*The love for me once crucified
Is not the love to leave my side,
But waiteth ever to divide
Each smallest care of mine."*

We have hints of the same truth in the Old Testament. For example, we read with reference to God's people: "In all their afflictions he was afflicted." But the New Testament teaching means far more than this, for Christ lived all the story of human life through to its close, for himself, and, therefore, knows it by experience. When we are weary, it comforts us to remember that many times he was weary, too. When we are treated unfairly, unkindly, or even with bitter wrong, it strengthens us to know that he understands, because he suffered in the same way. In our temptations it helps us to endure to remember that he was "tempted in all points like as we are." In any path in which we have to walk we can always find his footprints—he went over the same way before us, and, therefore, understands and sympathizes with us.

There are many experiences in which the

The Sympathy of Christ

sympathy of Christ, if it were realized, would give great comfort. There are people who are misunderstood. Indeed, there is no one whom others always fully understand. Even our truest friends oftentimes put wrong constructions upon what we do or what we say. Little things separate lives which ought to be kept close together. Very much sadness is caused by misunderstandings.

*“Not understood! How many hearts are aching
For lack of sympathy! Ah, day by day,
How many cheerless, lonely hearts are breaking,
How many noble spirits pass away
Not understood!”*

*“O God! that men would see a little clearer,
Or judge less harshly when they cannot see.
O God! that men might draw a little nearer
To one another. They'd be nearer thee,
And understood.”*

But Christ understands us perfectly. He knows all the truth about us. He knows our faults, and is patient with them, and does not chide us, nor cast us off because of them, but

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helps us to overcome them. When we are blamed unjustly, he understands and sympathizes with us and strengthens us to go on in patience. When we have done wrong, he knows, but is pitiful toward our weakness, and merciful toward our sin, if only we are striving ever to grow better. In every mood of our experience he sympathizes with us.

There are sorrows in every life, many of which are inexplicable. There are those whose quietest days are full of struggles of which their closest friends can know nothing. It is very hard for some people to be good, to resist temptation, to keep sweet under irritation and insult, to maintain purity of heart amid all the enticements of temptation. Nothing else gives such strength and help in hard experiences as knowing of the unfailing sympathy of Christ.

The superintendent of an inebriate asylum said that he always had hope of even the worst case of intemperance, if he knew that the man had some one at home who loved him and was praying for him; but that he had

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little hope of the permanent reform of any one for whom there was no wrestling love at home. If there is such help in human love and interest and prayer, how much more must there be in the confidence that Christ is sympathizing and interceding?

The story is told of a distinguished woman, that when she was a girl she was so homely that even her mother said to her one day: "My poor child, you are so ugly that no one will ever love you." The cruel words fell into the child's heart, but instead of making her bitter they had just the opposite effect. She determined that if her face was homely she would make her life so beautiful that people would love her. She began to be kind to everybody, to be loving, thoughtful, gentle, helpful. She never became handsome in features, but she did become the good angel of the community in which she lived. It was love in her heart that transformed her life and saved her from utter disheartenment.

There are those whose lives have been hurt in some way, and who seem doomed to carry

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their marring or wounding through all their days, but whom the love of Christ can yet restore to beauty and strength. There is no ruin which he cannot build up again into fair loveliness. There is no defeat which he cannot turn into victory. To know that he is touched, the Christ on his throne of glory, with the feeling of our infirmities puts into the heart a new secret of joy which will transform the dreariest life into heavenly gladness.

The Only Bond

*"I feel the unutterable longing,
The hunger of the breast is mine;
I reach and grasp for hands in darkness,
My ear grows sharp for voice or sign.*

*"O friend, no proof beyond this yearning,
This outstretch of our hands we need;
God will not mock this hope he giveth,
No love he prompts shall vainly plead.*

*"Then let us stretch our hands in darkness,
And call our loved ones o'er and o'er;
Some day their arms shall close about us,
And the old voices speak once more."*

CHAPTER SIXTH

The Only Bond



VERY life has its secret, that which accounts for its trend, its choices, its toils, its achievements. When we see a mother with her sick child, forgetting herself, losing her rest, bending day and night over the bed where the little life is flickering, we know the secret of her devoted watching. It is love that is at the heart of it all.

There is a story of a ship captain who sails away over the sea on long voyages. He is deeply interested in all his duties and performs them with utmost faithfulness. He spends long nights on deck, studying the problems of the sea and guiding his ship through the perils. At last he reaches his destination, and in due time sails back again

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with his cargo from foreign lands, arriving through all the dangers of the long voyage. And then—what then? He goes on shore and hurries to a quiet cottage where a little child is living in a nurse's care, and gives into the child's hands all that he has earned. That child is the secret of all his toil and care, the inspiration of all his voyages. He has not talked of her, nor seemed to be thinking of her, but in reality she has been at the center of his heart all the while. If he had come back and found the cottage empty and only a little grave to lavish his love upon, he would have cared nothing for all the fruits of his success. Love is the secret.

It is worth our while to ask what is the secret of our own life. Of course, there are human loves and there are secondary motives, but what is the great central motive? Is there anything stronger than home and loved ones and earthly ambitions, that impel us to toil, to struggle, to sacrifice? Saint Paul tells us the secret of his wonderful life in one little word—"The love of Christ constraineth us."

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*“Under an eastern sky,
Amid a rabble cry,
A man went forth to die—
For me.*

*“Thorn-crowned his blessed head,
Blood-stained his every tread,
Cross-laden, on he sped—
For me.”*

“The love of Christ constraineth us.” Commentators discuss the question whether this means Christ’s love for us or ours for him. It must mean both. Christ’s love for us comes first. What the sun is to the trees and grasses and flowers in the springtime, the love of Christ is to our love. If he did not love us, we never should love him. Our love would sleep on and never awake but for his kiss. When we begin to know that Christ loves us we begin to love him. “We love him because he first loved us.”

Christ’s love transforms. It repeats itself in our lives. A chaplain on a battlefield came to a man who was wounded, lying on the

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ground. "Would you like me to read you something from this book—the Bible?" he asked the soldier. "I'm so thirsty," replied the man; "I would rather have a drink of water." Quickly as he could the chaplain brought the water and held it to the parched lips. Then the soldier asked, "Could you put something under my head?" The chaplain took off his own light overcoat, rolled it, and put it gently under the soldier's head for a pillow. "Now," said the soldier, "if I had something over me! I am very cold." There was only one thing the chaplain could do. He took off his own coat and spread it over the soldier. The wounded man looked up into his face and said gratefully, "Thank you." Then after a moment's pause he said: "If there is anything in that book in your hand that makes a man do for another what you have done for me, please read it to me." Men are ready to hear us read the book which tells of the love of Christ for them only when our lives interpret what the book says.

Recently a story appeared in one of the

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papers, entitled, "How a Man Coined His Heart." It was a poor artist. There had been in his life a sad story of love, true and deep on his part, yet seemingly unrequited, and even false, on the part of the other. The world had not known anything of it—he had kept his secret very close. But there came a call for a piece of work—a calendar—and the artist put his life's whole story into it—the springtime, with its beauty; the summer, with its bloom; the autumn, with its decaying hope; the winter, with its dreary desolation. He coined his heart into his picture and sold it to get bread for his hunger. Christ coined his heart into a great sacrifice of love, and purchased redemption for the world. The cross is the love of Christ, pouring out its gold. So we are to coin our hearts into lives of love and service, into deeds of kindness and helpfulness.

Nothing but the love of Christ in us will enable us to do this. A soldier may be without love for the commander or for the cause he serves, and may march and fight merely for

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the paltry money he receives. But the Christian must love his Master or his life will count for nothing. There is a legend of an artist who had a marvelous red tint in his pictures. No other had learned the secret and it died with him. After his death a red wound was discovered near his heart and the secret of the wonderful color in his paintings was revealed. It was his heart's blood that gave his work its inimitable tint. The old legend tells a deep spiritual truth. Only heart's blood will give value to what we do, will put the heavenly color into our work. What we do without love fades out. When it is the love of Christ that constrains us, our simplest, commonest acts have divine beauty and blessing in them.

The love of Christ is the only bond that can bind lives together inseparably and forever. People talk of reunions in the other world. "I cannot bring her back again," said one beside his dead, "but I can go to her." Yet we need to remember that only those who are bound together here by a common love for

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Christ shall find each other and know each other and be together in the other world.

Several years since, in one of the magazines, was this suggestive story: Once there was a woman who loved a man. He died, and she sought some way to reach him where he was, and could not. Then a heavenly messenger came to her and said: "I have been sent to help thee, for thy crying has been heard. What is thy need?"

The woman answered: "That I may find the soul of my husband, who is dead."

The Shining One said to her: "That may be done only if there is a bond between you that death could not break."

She said: "Surely there is a bond. I have lain in his bosom. I have borne the sacred name of wife."

But the angel shook his head and said: "That is no bond."

Then she raised her head proudly and said: "Surely there is a bond. I have held his children in my arms; with their innocence have they bound us together. By the sorrow in

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which I bore them there is an enduring bond." But the angel said, very sadly: "Even this will not suffice."

Then the woman paled, but she said: "My spirit and that of my husband were one. In naught were we separate. Each answered each without speech. We were one. Does not that bond hold?"

But the angel answered very low: "It does not hold. In the domain of death all these bonds of which thou speakest crumble to nothing. The very shape of them has departed, so that they are as if they never were. Think yet once more, I pray thee, before I leave thee, if there is one thread to bind thee to him whom thou lovest; for if not, he has passed from thee forever."

The woman was silent, but she cried to herself desperately: "He shall not go from me!" The angel withdrew a little way, and the woman thought and thought, with deep inward communing, and after a space she raised her face, and said: "Once—but it was long ago—he and I thought of God together."

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The angel gave a loud cry, and his shining wings smote the earth, and he said: "Thou hast found the bond. Thou hast found the bond."

The woman looked, and lo! there lay in her hand a tiny thread, faintly golden, as if woven from the strands of the sunlight, and it led into the darkness.

A truth is taught in this story—only those who think of God together have between them a bond of union which death cannot sever. The only tie which never shall be broken is love for Christ. Those whom this sacred bond unites never shall be separated. If this love is not in us, there is nothing in our lives which will endure; all else will perish.

The Master at Prayer

*When prayer delights thee least, then learn to say,
"Soul, now is thy greatest need that thou shouldst pray."*

*Crooked and warped I am, and I would fain
Straighten myself by thy right line again.*

—ARCHBISHOP TRENCH.

*God answers prayer; sometimes, when hearts are weak,
He gives the very gifts believers seek.*

*But often faith must learn a deeper rest,
And trust God's silence when he does not speak;
For he, whose name is Love, will send the best.
Stars may burn out, nor mountain walls endure,
But God is true, his promises are sure
To those who seek.*

—MYRA GOODWIN PLANTZ.

CHAPTER SEVENTH

The Master at Prayer



WHEN General Gordon was with his army in Khartoum it is said that there was an hour every day when a white handkerchief lay over his tent door.

While that signal was there no one, however high his rank, ever approached the tent. The most urgent business waited outside. Every one knew that Gordon was at prayer that hour within the tent, and not a man nor an officer came near until the handkerchief was lifted away.

There is always a sacredness about prayer. We instantly withdraw if unawares we suddenly come upon one engaged in prayer. We are awed into reverence when we see any one, however humble, bowing in prayer. But the sight of Christ at prayer touches us with still

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deeper awe. We uncover our heads, and take off our shoes, and stand afar off in reverent hush while he bows before his Father and communes with him. Yet no figure is more familiar in the Gospels than the Master at prayer.

It brings Christ very near to us to see him in this holy posture. We think of him as the Son of God, as having in himself all power, all blessing, all comfort, and all divine fullness, and as not needing to ask even his Father for anything. But when he became man he accepted all our life. He lived as we must live. He was dependent on God, as we are, for help, for strength, for deliverance in temptation, for all blessing and good. He prayed as we do, pleading earnestly as he taught us to do. When we think how completely and fully Jesus entered into all our life of trust and dependence we get a vivid impression of his closeness to us. And if he, the Son of man, who knew no sin, who was also Son of God, needed to pray so continually, how can any of us, weak, sinful, needy,

The Master at Prayer

with imperiled lives, with empty lives, get along without prayer?

In a sense, Jesus was always at prayer. His communion with God was never interrupted for a moment. One of Saint Paul's exhortations is, "Pray without ceasing." Our Lord fulfilled this ideal. He was not always on his knees. He passed most of his days in exhausting service. But in all his ministry of love he never ceased to pray.

He was not always asking favors of his Father. That is the only kind of praying some people seem to know anything about. They pray only when they are in trouble, and want to be helped out of it. But that is a very small part of true prayer. We want to be with our friends as much as we can. Though we have no request to make of them, we like to talk with them of things in which they and we are mutually interested, or even to sit in silence without speech.

*"Rather, as friends sit sometimes hand in hand,
Nor mar with words the sweet speech of their eyes;
So in soft silence let us oftener bow,*

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*Nor try with words to make God understand.
Longing is prayer; upon its wings we rise
To where the breath of heaven beats upon our brow."*

Some friends wanted to know how the holy Bengel prayed, and watched him at his devotions one night. He opened his New Testament and read slowly and silently, often pausing in meditation, or as if listening to the voice of gentle stillness. There was a glow in his features, and frequently he would look up as if he saw a face his watchers could not see. Thus an hour passed. He had not once been on his knees, nor had he been heard to utter a word. Then as the clock struck the hour for his retiring he closed the book, saying only, "Dear Lord Jesus, we are on the same old terms," and went to his bed. That was truest prayer. That is what it is to pray without ceasing—to be always near enough to God to talk with him, always to be drinking in his love even in our busiest hours.

But, while Jesus prayed thus without ceasing, there were many occasions of special prayer in his life. Again and again he went apart

The Master at Prayer

from men to be alone with God. He spent whole nights in communion beneath the silent stars.

*“Cold mountains and the midnight air
Witnessed the fervor of thy prayer.”*

It will be interesting to notice some of the occasions on which Jesus prayed. The first of these was at the time of his baptism. Whatever else his baptism meant, it was his consecration to the work of his Messiahship. He knew what it involved. He saw the cross yonder, but he voluntarily entered on his course of love and sacrifice. As he was being baptized he prayed, and the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon him. His praying that hour showed his deep longing and desire for the divine anointing to prepare him for his great work.

This example of Jesus teaches us to seek divine blessing as we begin our life work, also as we enter any new calling, as we accept any new responsibility. People sometimes forget that they need divine anointing for what they

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call secular work. They want God's Spirit to help them in their religious duties, but they do not suppose that they need heavenly anointing for a business life, or a professional life, or for the taskwork of their common days. Yet there is nothing we have to do, however unspiritual it may seem, in the doing of which we do not need the help of the Holy Spirit. Another of the occasions on which Jesus prayed was before he chose his disciples. This choice was most important. These men were to be with him as his close, constant companions, his personal friends. He would need their companionship, their sympathy, their love. Then upon them would rest a grave responsibility after he was gone. He was to train them, so that they would be ready to carry on his work. They must be men capable of absolute devotion to his will, men who could endure persecution, men whom the Holy Spirit could use. It was of the greatest importance that no mistake should be made. So, before choosing them, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer.

The Master at Prayer

A great deal of folly is committed in the world by ignorant and foolish choices. It is so in choosing friends. We do not know what any such choice may mean to us, whether it may bring us joy or sorrow, whether it may put upon our life touches of beauty or of marring. If Jesus prayed all night before choosing his friends, young people setting out in life should very earnestly seek God's guidance before taking into their lives any new companionship.

But the lesson applies to all choices and decisions. We do not know what path to take in all the tangled network of ways. We do not know to what any new road may lead us. We chafe and fret when we are not allowed to have our own way. But really we have no wisdom to choose what is best for us. We are safe only when we are divinely led.

We behold the Master at prayer again, and this time something very wonderful happens. One evening he climbed a high mountain to get away from earth's noises and confusions. He was setting out on his last journey to his

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cross, and sought strength for it. While he was praying, he was transfigured. The inference for us is that earnest prayer always transfigures.

And there are so many people who need transfiguring! Their faces are not bright. They lack joy. The peace of God is not revealed in them. They bear the marks of care, of fret, of anxiety, of discontent. They tell of defeat and disheartenment. Yet the love of Christ is meant to transfigure our lives. Paul gives us the secret when he tells us to be anxious for nothing, but instead to take every troubling thing to God in prayer, and then adds that if we do this the peace of God shall guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. The peace of God, then, makes shining faces. There is no reason why our dull faces should not shine. "As he was praying the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment became white and dazzling."

We see the Master at prayer again, this time in Gethsemane. It was here that he prepared

The Master at Prayer

for his cross. We should notice that his refuge in his exceeding sorrow was prayer, and that, as the sorrow deepened, the refuge still was prayer. "Being in an agony he prayed more earnestly." Prayer is the only refuge in sorrow. The lesson from the garden prayer is that we should take all the hard things, the anguishes, the insufferable pains, the bitter griefs of our lives, to God in prayer. We may be sure, too, that God will answer. If he does not relieve us of the suffering, he will strengthen us so that we can keep it, and still go on trusting and singing.

No doubt, much of our Lord's prayer was intercession. We have one or two glimpses of this interceding. He said to Peter in great sadness: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not." There is a wondrous revealing of comfort in this for us when we remember that as our Great High Priest he ever liveth to make intercession for us. Another instance of intercession was on the cross, when

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he prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Not his murderers only, but all men, were included in that prayer of redemption, as the sacrificial blood began to flow.

That last prayer of Jesus was, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." Thus his spirit went forth on the wings of prayer into his Father's bosom. So it shall be with us, his friends, when we come to the edge of the great mystery, and cannot see the way. Dying, for a Christian, is but flying away from earth's passing things to be with God forever.

The Master on the Beach

*“Beside thy gracious heart content I stay,
Or with thee fate’s appointed journey go;
I lean upon thee when my step is slow,
I wrap me with thee in the naked day.*

*“With thee no loneliness, no pathless way,
The wind is heaven’s, to take as it shall blow:
More than thy voice, thy hand, I need not know;
I may not murmur, for I shall not stray.”*

CHAPTER EIGHTH

The Master on the Beach



ONE of the most interesting of our Lord's appearances after his resurrection was the one which took place beside the sea. The scene shows a fire burning on the beach, with fish broiling on the coals, and bread; then beside the fire, the Master.

The scene meant a great deal to the disciples. First of all, it had its cheer for them. We have lost much in our modern homes in giving up the old-fashioned fireplace with its blazing logs, and even in losing the open grate. The fire on the hearth was a brightener of the home. It is only in a poetical way that we can talk now about our hearthstones.

The fire burning on the sand that spring morning made the shore appear more attractive and hospitable to the tired fishermen.

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Then there was more than a fire; there were provisions—fish broiling, and bread. Had the Master himself kindled the fire? At least it was his thought and love that provided the breakfast. Indeed, it was the presence of the Master himself that gave to the scene its deepest meaning. Always it is the human element that is the charm in any scene. There is a story of a picture that seemed to be almost perfect, and yet people did not stop to look at it long, and were not moved to enthusiastic admiration as they stood before it. It lacked something. The artist discovered what the lack was, and taking his brush he painted a bit of human life on the canvas—a woman and a child—and now the picture had a resistless charm for every one who saw it.

That lonely beach would have had a certain attraction for those discouraged fishermen that morning, even if they had seen nothing but the fire burning on it. But it was the human form standing beside the fire that gave the scene its chief attraction. Then when we remember who the man was that stood in the

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dim gray of the morning and called to the fishermen, we need seek no further for the reasons why that morning hour was ever after so sacred in the memory of those men. They had found their Lord again.

The presence of Christ changes everything wherever it is recognized. It changed everything for those men. The sea had never been so beautiful to their eyes before. The hills had never looked so glorious in their spring verdure. No morning had ever appeared in such radiant splendor as that morning. Their sorrow was changed into joy and their loneliness into the blessedness of holiest companionship.

So always, when Christ comes into our lives, all things are made new. A letter received the other day illustrates this. The writer has been a Christian many years—faithful, trusting, helpful, and full of good works. But during the past three months there has been serious illness in her home—a beloved daughter has been lying in fever. In this experience the mother has learned as never before

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how real is the love of Christ in the lives of his friends. "No story could be told which would be more wonderful than the story of the goodness shown to me these months, nothing more nearly reaching the miraculous than the way Christ has sent comfort and blessing to me and to my sick child." Then she goes over the story, and it is wonderful indeed. At the moment of need the right comfort always came. A nurse was necessary, but could not be afforded. Then a message came from an old friend, not seen for years, and the nurse was provided. Letters came every day with their sympathy and cheer, just when the mother's burden seemed too heavy for her to bear. Every memory of the suffering of these months is made bright with some thought of Christ's love which came at the right moment. Everything has been transfigured for this mother. She found the fire burning on the beach, with fish thereon and bread, and the Master standing by.

This scene on the beach had also its comfort for the disciples. For three years they had

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been with their Master in closest companionship. He had received them into most intimate fellowship. They had heard his teachings and experienced his friendship in its most sacred revealings. Some of us know what even a rich-hearted, noble, strong, gentle, true human friend may be to us in the way of comfort and strength. One wrote to another :

*I wish that I might tell you what you are
To me—you seem so fine and strong and true,
So bold, and yet so gentle, so apart
From petty strivings that confuse men's minds.
I wish that I might make you understand
How your clean, brave young life has made me brave,
How I am cheered and strengthened and upheld,
When I consider that the world holds you
A hero; in a world of false ideals
Your truth, your worth, has blazed its own brave way.*

If a noble human friendship can mean so much to one who enjoys its blessings, what must the friendship of Christ have meant to the men who had enjoyed all that was tender

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and precious in it! But now this precious companionship was ended. In their bewilderment without his presence, the disciples had gone back to their old work. "I go a fishing," said Simon. "We also come with thee," the others said. But how weary it must have seemed, this tiresome handling of boats and oars and ropes and nets, after those three years of exalted friendship with Christ! They had supposed that this sort of commonplace work would never be theirs again. But now it seemed all that was left for them to do. They were heroic in returning to the old tasks, dreary though they were. They took up the work that was at hand, dull though it was, and lo! there stood the Master by the fire, with comfort and blessing for them.

The time of the appearance of Jesus was most opportune. It was when the men were at their work. A little while before he had appeared to them in the upper room, when they were at prayer. We expect Christ to meet us when we assemble to worship him. But here the appearance was when they were at their

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old occupation. Christ will meet us, not only at the communion or at the mercy seat—he is quite as likely to manifest himself to us in the dullest task-work of the common days.

*“So still, dear Lord, in every place
Thou standest by the toiling folk
With love and pity in thy face,
And givest of thy help and grace
To those who meekly bear the yoke.”*

In every life there are tasks which are irksome. Young people sometimes think school work dull. There are faithful mothers who grow weary in the endless tasks of the household life. There are men who sometimes tire of the routine of the office, the store, the shop. There comes to all of us at times the feeling that our work is not quite worthy of us. We have had a glimpse of life in some exalted experience. It may have been a companionship for a time with one above us in circumstances or in attainments, and now it irks us to come back again to the old plodding round, or to the old, plain, commonplace

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associations. After three years with Jesus, we can easily understand how distasteful to the disciples it was to return to the fisherman's life, among the rude, coarse and ungentle Galilæan fishermen with whom they must associate.

A young woman spent ten months in a home of rare refinement and grace, with the best books and music and art and culture in the daily home life. Then she returned to her own lowly home, with its plain circumstances, its lack of art and music and books, and its many uncongenialities,—a home, too, that was not always sweet in its fellowships, and we can understand how hard it was for her to do this.

Sometimes this happens: There comes a reverse in fortune which changes all one's circumstances. The income is cut off perhaps by the death of the bread-winner, and leisure, ease and elegance have to be exchanged for plain conditions, poverty, toil and bare rooms. It is not easy to leave the beautiful home and go to live in a tenement or in a narrow

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court. The experience tests character, and some people lose their courage and hope in the testing. Some, however, meet it nobly, because they have Christ. A man thinks he is settled for life in a condition of comfort and elegance, that his prosperity is sure and cannot be broken. Then suddenly, all his dreams vanish. He loses all he has. His first thought is, "How can I go back to the bare circumstances, the hard tasks, the dull drudgery, the long hours, the grinding routine under an exacting master?"

Some such feelings were in the minds of the disciples that morning when they saw the fire burning on the beach. They had taken up their old occupation as a duty, and there was the Master waiting to greet them. So it will always be with those who bravely accept changed conditions and nobly take up the work that lies nearest, though it be hard and distasteful.

Another suggestion from this scene is that Christ helps his friends in their common task-work. The disciples were sorely discouraged.

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They had been dragging their nets all night and had nothing to show for their toil. Morning began to dawn, and lifting up their eyes, they saw a fire burning on the beach, and their Master standing beside it. At once he showed his sympathy with them. Knowing their disheartenment, he called to them, "Children, have ye aught to eat?" He is always trying to cheer us and make us brave and strong. Then a moment later he told them where to cast their net, and they drew it full.

We must notice that it was their secular work in which Jesus helped these men. We expect him to help us in our praying, our religious duties, our church work, but here we have him helping at a piece of common task-work. Christ has a deep interest in our worldly affairs and occupations, in our toil and burden-bearing. Somehow, many good people expect no divine interest and help in their week-day work. But here we see the Master helping his friends at their fishing. This suggests to us how earthly success depends on the Master's direction. We may ask

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him to show us where to drop our nets. Many of us get disheartened when things do not seem to go well. Our business is not as profitable as we could wish. Burdens are heavy, competition is keen. We do not get on well. Ofttimes it is with us as it was with the disciples that morning,—hard, discouraging, fruitless toil. Then it was at the close of that long, toilsome night, with nothing to show for its work, that, looking shoreward, they saw a fire burning on the beach and the Master standing beside it.

That is the picture for us all. Ever the fire is burning on the beach. Always the Master is full of sympathy when we have failed or are discouraged. Always he will help, changing failure into success, filling nets empty until now. Over against all failure, at the dawn of every morning that breaks after a night of unavailing toil, Jesus stands on the shore to give help, blessing and cheer.

Thus, the fire on the beach is the token of Christ's interest in all our work and a pledge of his help in things we call secular as well

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as in things we call spiritual. Jesus is always the friend of the toiling folk, and makes many of the sweetest revealings in lowly and humble places. Henry van Dyke puts it thus :

*Never in a costly palace did I rest on golden bed,
Never in a hermit's cavern have I eaten idle bread.*

*Born within a lowly stable where the cattle round me
stood,
Trained a carpenter in Nazareth, I have toiled and
found it good.*

*They who tread the path of labor follow where my feet
have trod;
They who work without complaining do the holy will
of God.*

*Where the many toil together, there am I among my
own;
Where the tired workman sleepeth, there am I with
him alone.*

*I, the peace that passeth knowledge, dwell amid the
daily strife,
I, the bread of heaven, am broken in the sacrament of
life.*

In the Love of God

*O love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.*

*O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.*

—GEORGE MATHESON.

CHAPTER NINTH

In the Love of God



SCRIPTURAL counsel bids us keep ourselves in the love of God. This does not mean that we should keep ourselves loving God. Of course, we should always love God. He should ever have the first place in our affection. Not to love God is to fail in our first and holiest duty, to cut ourselves off from the source of all blessing, and to rob our lives of the best good.

Yet that is not what is meant in the exhortation to keep ourselves in the love of God. We all know something of the experience of discouragement which oftentimes comes when the duty of loving God is pressed upon us. Our love seems so feeble, so unsatisfactory, so much less intense than it should be, and so fitful and changeable, that it does not comfort us to think of it. It is well, therefore,

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that we are not asked to measure our faith by the degree of our love of God. If this were the index, our heart's joy would be sadly variable. It is well that we have for our comfort something better than our poor, fitful love for God.

*“Our love so faint, so cold to thee,
And thine to us so great.”*

We are taught to keep ourselves in God's love, in its blessed warmth, believing in it, trusting in it, letting it flood our lives.

*“Thine the bearing and forbearing
Through the patient years;
Thine the loving, and the moving
Plea of sacred tears.*

* * * *

*“Mine the leaving and the grieving
Of thy mournful eyes;
Mine the fretting and forgetting
Of our blood-bound ties.*

* * * *

*“Mine the wrecking, thine the building,
Of my happiness—
My only Saviour, help me make
The dreadful difference less.”*

In the Love of God

The love of God is infinite. It is infinite in its tenderness. Human love is easily wearied. The divine love is inexhaustible in its patience and gentleness. Looking back over his past life, with all its follies, failures and sins, and remembering the goodness of God which never had given him up, but which had brought him to honor and power, David, in his old age, gave the secret of it all in the words, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." None of us know how much we owe to God's gentleness.

A writer tells the story of a boy who at the age of eight was regarded as being of feeble mind, hopelessly imbecile, the result of some illness in infancy. The boy's father was widely known as an educator. Inspired by his deep love for his child, he took personal charge of his training, devoting himself to it most assiduously. If the boy had been sent to ordinary schools, he would probably never have been anything but an imbecile. As it was, however, he became bright and talented, passed with honor through one of the great

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universities, and became a man of ability and influence. The father's gentleness made him great. His genius as a teacher, inspired by his strong love for his child, took the poor, stunted life, and by patience developed its latent possibilities into beauty and noble strength.

That is what God's wonderful love does with us. What would we have been but for the divine care of us? As the warm sunshine falling upon the bare, dried, briery bush, unsightly and apparently useless, woos out leaves and buds and marvelous roses, so the warm love of God, falling upon our poor, sin-hurt lives, with only death before them, awakens in them heavenly yearnings and longings and aspirations, and leads them out and glorifies them.

There is wonderful inspiration in the knowledge and consciousness that God loves us. A newsboy was in the habit of running after a gentleman on the ferry-boat and brushing his coat with affectionate fondness. One day the gentleman asked him, "Why are

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you so careful with me every morning?" The boy answered, "Because once, when you bought a paper, you said, 'My child!' No one ever called me his child before. That's the reason. I love you for saying that to me." It was the first love the boy had found in this world, and it was like heaven to him. It is a blessed moment to us when we first realize that God is our Father, and calls us his own children. It fills us with unspeakable joy. It brings the love of God about us in floods. It lifts us up into heaven in our experience.

If we keep ourselves in the love of God, the love of God will enter into us and fill us. We seem to have now but a small measure of this divine love in us. We are unloving in our own lives. We chafe easily when others irritate us. We are readily vexed and offended and hold grudges and resentments. If God were like us, what would become of us? If he were so unforbearing, unforgiving, and uncharitable as we are, if he had no more mercy on us than we have on those who unintention-

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tionally or intentionally hurt us, what would become of us? But if we keep ourselves in the love of God, all this is changed. The love in us transforms us into its own spirit. If a bar of iron lies in the fire for a time, it becomes red-hot—the fire enters into the iron and transfigures it. A lump of clay lying on a rose, becomes fragrant—the rose's sweetness enters into it. A grain of musk in a bureau drawer fills all the garments in the drawer with its perfume. If we keep ourselves in the love of God, in the atmosphere of that love, our whole being becomes saturated with it until we live as God lives. It was written of one Christian man,

*“His life grew fragrant with the inner soul,
And weary folk who passed him on the street
Saw Christ's love beam from out the wistful eyes,
And had new confidence in God and men.”*

So will it be with all who truly keep themselves in the love of God. Their lives will be transformed into the grace and beauty of Christ, and the weary ones who see them and

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know them will have new faith in God and new love for men.

The love of God is a wonderful refuge to those who hide away in it. A favorite picture in the Old Testament is the hiding of the troubled or hunted life under the wings of the Almighty. Saint Paul has a great word about the Christian's life being hid with Christ in God. This is indeed a marvelous hiding—in the heart of Christ, and then in this sacred enfolding carried back into the infinite depths of deity. Those who flee to the love of God for refuge are safe eternally. Neither height nor depth nor angel nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this refuge the world's harm never can reach us. It was in this divine keeping that Christ himself was sheltered that night on the sea when he slept on the boat, and the wild storm and the mad sweep of the waves did not disturb him. He was wrapped in the

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folds of the same love in all the troubled hours of his trial and crucifixion. He spoke of his peace—nothing ever broke the quiet of the calm of his spirit. Then he promises to give the same peace, his own peace, to all who believe on him. “My peace I give unto you.” “In me ye shall have peace.” This is the benediction of those who keep themselves in the love of God.

The Abundant Life

CHAPTER TENTH

The Abundant Life



HE divine ideal for life is health, not sickness; enthusiasm, not languor; branches bending with fruit, not covered only with leaves. Christ wants us to have abundant spiritual life. He is infinitely patient with weakness, but he would have us strong. He accepts the smallest service anyone may render, but he desires us to serve him with our whole heart. The weakest faith has power and gets blessing from him, but he is best pleased with the faith that triumphs over all difficulties and accomplishes impossibilities. He does not despise the smoking flax, with merely a spark remaining,—he will nourish it till it glows in a hot flame; but he wishes us to be burning and shining lights. Even a little measure of love

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pleases him, but he longs for love that fills all the being. The spiritual life begins as a tiny spring of water bubbling up in our hearts, but the Master desires it to grow until it becomes rivers of water. He came that his followers might have life and might have it abundantly.

The abundant life need not be a showy and conspicuous one, nor one that makes much noise in the world. Some people suppose that they are living to a worthy purpose only when they are filling a prominent and conspicuous place among men, doing work which draws all eyes to it. They think they are of no use if they are not making a stir in the world. But there are some whose voices are heard widely in the community where they dwell and yet have little in them that pleases God. They are "rich in outward incident, but poor in inward experience." Or one may have an abundant spiritual life, and yet move among men so quietly as almost to be unheard and unknown. It was of our Lord himself that it was written in an ancient prophecy,

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"He shall not strive, nor cry aloud;

Neither shall anyone hear his voice in the streets."

No other man ever had such fullness and abundance of life as Christ himself had, and yet no other ever lived and wrought so quietly. Noise is not force. The real power of life is in its influence, in its force of character, in its personality. Many of those who are fullest of Christ are least known among men. Humility is one of the divinest of graces. One asked Augustine what he regarded as the first of all Christian virtues. He answered, "Humility." "The second?" He answered, "Humility." "And the third?" "Humility." Our Lord put the same quality first in his Beatitudes,—*"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* It is the lowly ones of earth who live nearest to the heart of Christ and have most of his Spirit in them.

The abundant life need not be known by its large money gifts. The tendency is to measure every man's value to the world by his charities. No doubt money has its value. Those who give to education, to religion, to

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philanthropy, if their gifts are wisely bestowed, greatly bless the world. Nothing should be said to chill the ardor of those who devote their money to worthy causes. Yet money never is the best gift which a man may bestow upon his fellows.

There is a story of a famishing pilgrim in the desert who found a sack which he thought contained food. When he had eagerly torn it open it had in it a great treasure of pearls—some man's whole fortune dropped in the sands. But he flung it from him in anguish. It was food that he wanted, and the bag of pearls was only a bitter mockery to his hunger. There are great human needs which money has no power to satisfy, but to which a true heart's gentle love will be the very bread of God. There are sorrows which money cannot soothe, but which a word of loving comfort will change into songs.

So far as we know, Jesus never gave money, and yet the world has never known another such lavish giver as he was. Imagine him

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going about with his hands full of coins and dispensing them among the poor, the lame, the blind, the sick—money, and nothing else. What a poor, paltry service his would then have been in comparison with the wonderful and gracious ministry of kindness and love which he wrought!

The abundant life may not have money to give and yet it may fill a whole community with blessings. It may go out with sympathy, with comfort, with inspirations of cheer and hope, and may make countless hearts braver and stronger. We do not know the value of the ministry, the influence upon others, of a strong, pure, peaceful, victorious face. A Hindoo woman met on the street a missionary who could not speak her language and said not a word to her. He only looked into her face and pointed upward. She hastened home and said that she had seen an angel of heaven. The glory of God shone on the missionary's countenance. We do not know when the joy and the love in our faces

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may put new hope into fainting hearts, and make men able to win the victory over depression or despondency, or over a great temptation.

The secret of abundant helpfulness is found in the desire to be a help, a blessing, to all we meet. One wrote to a bereft mother of her little one who had gone to heaven: "Gratia was in our home only once when but five years of age, and yet the influence of her brief stay has been filling every day since in all these three years, especially in the memory of one little sentence which was continually on the child's lips wherever she went, 'Can I help thee?' " We begin to be like Christ only when we begin to wish to be helpful. Where this desire is ever dominant, the life is an unceasing benediction. Rivers of water are pouring out from it continually to bless the world. One friend could say to another,

*"I never crossed your threshold with a grief
But that I went without it; never came
Heart-hunger, but you fed me, eased the blame,
And gave the sorrow solace and relief*

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*“I never left you but I took away
The love that drew me to your side again
Through that wide door that never could remain
Quite closed between us for a little day.”*

That is what might be the ministry of every one of us to others, to all who turn to us with their needs, their loneliness, their heart hungers, their sorrows. We should always have bread in our hands to give to those who are hungry, and cheer for those who come to us fainting and disheartened. Life is but another way of spelling love. It is more love we want when we cry out for the abundant life. Nothing but love will answer the great human needs about us. Nothing else will make people happier and better. The abundant life Christ came to give is simply fullness of love in the heart, pulsing out in all the veins.

How can we have this abundance of life? Most of us are conscious of the poverty and thinness of our spiritual life. We are not strong—we faint easily under our burdens and in our struggles. We are not living victoriously—we are defeated continually and

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overcome, by everything that assails us, by the smallest antagonism and opposition. We are not perennial fountains of love, sending out streams of the water of life for the refreshing and the renewing of the dreary places about us. At the best the streams of kindness and beneficence flow in our lives only intermittently. We have not much to give to the needy, hungry world that looks to us for cheer and strength. Men ask bread of us and all we have to give them is a stone. They come expecting fruit and find nothing but leaves. We are not so full of Christ that those who touch the hem of our garments feel the thrill of life in them and are healed and are made happier and better. Our spirits are not so charged with the love of God that our shadow, as we pass along the way, heals those on whom it falls. Our hearts are not so overflowing with a passion for being of use, that we involuntarily, unconsciously, impart to every one we meet some helpfulness, some comfort, some inspiration, some good.

Evidently it is more of the life of Christ in

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us that we need to give us richness of character, influence over others, the power of helpfulness, which our Master desires to find in us. We may have many other things which are desirable and pleasant—we may have money, gifts which others envy, places of honor and power—our hands may be full also of tasks. But lacking this fullness of life, our hearts are really empty. There is but little of God, of Christ, of heaven, in us. We have nothing to give others that would enrich them. Our brains may be teeming with plans and projects and dreams of success, but of spiritual life our veins are scant. It is life we need,—life, more life.

*“ ’Tis life whereof our nerves are scant ;
O, life, not death, for which we pant,
More life and fuller that we want.”*

Our deepest longing, therefore, and our most earnest prayer should be for greater fullness of spiritual life. We need it to measure up to our Master's ideal and purpose for us. We need it, too, to enable us to overcome the

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world. Our strength is soon exhausted, our lamp soon burns out. The good in us is soon overpowered by the evil about us. We need more of the joy of Christ in us that we may be able to master the sorrow that flows in upon us from the great world. We need more of the love of Christ that we may keep our hearts sweet and gracious amid all that makes it hard to be gracious, loving and kind. We need the fullness of the divine Spirit that we may have something worth while to give to those who turn to us with their emptiness, their hunger, their sorrow.

We Are Able

“*Lord, let me not be too content
With life in trifling service spent—
Make me aspire!
When days with petty cares are filled,
Let me with fleeting thoughts be thrilled
Of something higher.*”

“*Help me to long for mental grace
To struggle with the commonplace
I daily find.
May little deeds not bring to fruit
A crop of little thoughts, to suit
A shrivelled mind.*”

CHAPTER ELEVENTH

We Are Able



WHEN Jesus asked his two ambitious disciples if they were able to drink the cup he was about to drink and to be baptized with the baptism with which he was baptized, they said promptly, "We are able." Their heroic answer furnishes a noble motto for every phase of life. Whatever call comes to us, whether it be to sorrow or to joy, we should say in quiet confidence, "I am able."

This is a good motto for life in general. Too many people shrink from anything that is hard. They want only easy tasks. They fear to grapple with difficulties. They run away from hard battles. They attempt nothing they know they cannot do easily. They never grow into strength, for only in attempting hard things can one gain the ability to do

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things noble and beautiful. The habit of giving up easily is a fatal one. It weakens the will, paralyzes the energy, and stunts the growth of the life. What a man thinks he cannot do, he cannot do; but what he thinks he can do, he can do. The true man is he who can do things that are impossible—anybody can do possible things.

Our answer to every call of duty should be, "I am able." Whatever we ought to do, we can do. "I cannot" is a stunting, dwarfing word. Besides, it is a cowardly word. When we say it we do not know what we are missing. We allow magnificent possibilities to pass by and pass out of our reach, because we think we cannot achieve them. One of Emerson's poems pictures the days marching on in endless file, bringing gifts in their hands for us who miss them because of our poor timidity and indolence.

*"Daughters of time, the hypocritic Days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring diadems and jagots in their hands.*

We Are Able

*To each they offer gifts after his will,
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky that holds them
all.*

*I, in my pleached garden, watched the pomp,
Forgot my morning wishes, hastily
Took a few herbs and apples, and the Day
Turned and departed silent. I, too late,
Under her solemn fillet saw the scorn."*

The poet's picture is true of too many. The days come with great gifts in their hands—kingdoms, stars, sky, and diadems; we take a few herbs and apples, and let the messengers move on and vanish, still holding in their hands the splendid gifts which might have been ours. Many go through life missing countless opportunities for noble deeds and worthy achievements, only answering to their call, "I cannot."

"I am able" is the only fit reply to make to every command and requirement of Christ. James and John did not know what they were saying, but they faltered not. Their answer showed courage, the courage of the soldier. Soldiers never say, "I cannot." They know

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only to obey. The answer of these men also implied love for their Master. They were ready to suffer anything for his sake. What it would cost them to stand close to him they did not know, but whatever the cost would be they were ready to pay it. It was also the answer of faith. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah. What Messiahship meant they did not know. They had indeed most confused ideas upon the subject. Yet they believed in him. There always are those who have their difficulties with Christian doctrine. They cannot understand the teachings concerning the person and work of Christ. Yet they may cling to him and follow him ignorantly, loyal to the uttermost, as James and John did. Some day all will become clear. One of our poets makes an Oriental who had been listening to Jesus of Nazareth, utter these strong words,—

*“If Jesus Christ is a man;
And only a man—I say
That of all mankind I will cleave to him;
And to him will I cleave always.*

We Are Able

*“If Jesus Christ is a god—
And the only God—I swear
I will follow him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air.”*

“I am able” is always the motto for Christian faith. Faith deals with the unseen and invisible. We never know what we are engaging to do when we pledge ourselves to follow Christ unto the end. When Abraham was called, he went out, not knowing whither he went. In every life there are experiences of darkness. When we come up to the edge of things we dread, the Master asks, “Are ye able to drink my cup?” That is, “Are you able to follow me through this trial, this sorrow, this mystery of pain, this great sacrifice?” We must remember that the richest blessings of grace lie beyond experiences of pain. The question of the measure of blessing and good we are to receive is oftentimes another way of putting the question, whether we can pay the price or not. “Can you drink the cup which I am about to drink?” If we

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cannot, the blessing is beyond our reach. If these two men had said, "No; we are not able to drink the cup with thee," what would they have missed? There are many who do miss life's highest and best blessings because they cannot accept the condition. It should help our faith and courage in time of sore questioning to remember that it is the Master's cup we are to drink, and that we are to drink it not alone, but with him. Surely we can drink any cup with him.

*"But if himself he come to thee, and stand
Beside thee, gazing down on thee with eyes
That smile, and suffer; that will smite thy heart
With their own pity to a passionate peace;
And reach to thee himself the holy cup
(With all its wreathen stems of passion flowers
And quivering sparkles of the ruby stars),
Pallid and royal, saying, 'Drink with me,'
Wilt thou refuse? Nay, not for Paradise!
The pale brow will compel thee, the pure hands
Will minister unto thee; thou shalt take
Of that communion through the solemn depths
Of the dark waters of thine agony,*

We Are Able

*With heart that praises him, that yearns to him
The closer through that hour. Hold fast his hand
Though the nails pierce thine too ! take only care
Lest one drop of the sacramental wine
Be spilled, of that which ever shall unite
Thee, soul and body, to thy living Lord."*

"I am able" is the motto also for service. Christian life is a continual call to heroic deeds. It is not easy to be the kind of Christian Christ wants us to be. We can make life easy for ourselves if we will, but this will not please Christ. The two disciples wanted first places, and first places are never easy to fill. Jesus showed them that in his kingdom rank meant service. "He that would be first among you, must be servant of all." That is what it is to be a Christian. The mission of the Church is to bless men, to lift up the fallen, to succor the tempted, to relieve the distressed, to be a friend to the weary, the desolate and the lonely. "Are you able?" There is no other way to the high places. There is no other way to become a true minister of Christ. Four years in a college and three years in a

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theological seminary will make no young man a minister. A Presbytery may license and ordain him to preach the gospel after he has finished his course, but that will not make him a minister. Nothing will make anyone a minister but drinking Christ's cup and being baptized with Christ's baptism. Nor will anything else make one a Christian of the kind the Master wants. Uniting with the church will not do it. "Are you able to drink of my cup? Are you able to put your life into the service of men alongside your Master?"

To Each One His Work

*“Labor and rest,
These are the best
Blessings that heaven gives;
And happy he
Who makes them be
His gladness while he lives.”*

*“You must live each day at your very best :
The work of the world is done by few ;
God asks that a part be done by you.”*

CHAPTER TWELFTH

To Each One His Work



SOME people do not like to work. Perhaps it is true that the disinclination is natural and universal, and that we all have to learn to like to work. There is an impression prevalent that work was part of the curse of the fall, that if our first parents had kept their holy estate in Eden, work would not have been necessary. But this impression is incorrect. When man was created he was put into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it. Work, therefore, was part of the blessing of Eden and is part of the blessing of all life. It is a means of grace. No one can be a good Christian and not do anything, unless he is incapacitated in some way. Idleness is sin and there is always a curse on it.

Work is part of the plan of God for our

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lives. The affairs of the world go on well only when everyone is doing his part. To each one his particular work is assigned. Whether our part is great or small, conspicuous or obscure, if it is the divine allotment for us, it is noble and worthy. The Koran tells of Gabriel being sent to earth to do two things. One was to keep King Solomon in his exultation over his royal steeds from forgetting the hour of prayer; the other was to help a little yellow ant on the slope of Ararat, which had grown weary in getting home the food it was bearing. To Gabriel the one command seemed as important as the other, and the one task as worthy, since God had ordained both.

*“Silently he left
The Presence and prevented the king’s sin
And help the little ant at entering in.”*

If our work is divinely allotted nothing is unfit for kingliest hands. That which God assigns is most worthy. If blacking shoes is a man’s duty, is the task allotted to him

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for the time, there is no other work in all the world that would be so noble and worthy for him that particular day or hour.

To each one his work is given. None are omitted or overlooked in the assignment—no one is left without some task. Duties are not given to some while others are sent out with nothing to do. We are all put into this world to work until our days for service here are closed.

*“What are we set on earth for? Say, to toil;
Nor seek to leave thy tending of the vines,
For all the heat o’ the day, till it declines,
And death’s mild curfew shall from work assoil.”*

To each his own particular work is given. Not all have the same task, nor is the distribution of duties a haphazard one. People differ in abilities, and the tasks are suited to the hands. If, then, we do not do our own allotted work it will not be done, and there will be a blank in God’s universe where there ought to have been a piece of work well done. It matters not how small our part is, the

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doing of it perfectly is essential to the completeness of the divine plan, and the failure to do it well will leave a flaw.

*“One small life in God’s great plan !
How futile it seems as the ages roll,
Do what it may or strive how it can,
To alter the sweep of the infinite whole !
A single stitch in an endless web,
A drop in the ocean’s flow and ebb !
But the pattern is rent where the stitch is lost,
Or marred where the tangled threads have crossed ;
And each life that fails of its true intent
Mars the perfect plan that the Master meant.”*

What is true of work in general is true of Christian work as well. In a sense all work is religious. Everything is to be done in the name of Christ and for him, and all duty is part of God’s will for us. Every piece of work has a moral value. Either we do it right and please God, or we do it indifferently and imperfectly, and so sin against God. The commonest tasks are as sacred in their way as are our prayers and songs of praise. Jesus himself was engaged in his

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Father's business quite as truly and as acceptably when he was working in the carpenter shop, as when afterwards he was teaching and healing the people.

Yet we all have duties besides those which belong to our week-day callings. It is not enough for any man to be a carpenter or a builder or a merchant or a physician or a farmer. Everyone must be, first of all, a Christian—Christ's man. We should do our secular work for Christ and do it well, but we should be a great deal larger than the little measure of our week-day occupation, and should do far more every day than our little stint of common taskwork in the shop or in the field. We represent our Master in this world and must not slack our diligence in the things that he would do for people if he were here.

In our Christian work, then, we should be as enthusiastic and as earnest as we are in our secular pursuits. If we are conspicuous in the world's work we should certainly be no less conspicuous in our work for the Master's

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kingdom. Few even of the best Christians do their best for their Master. Saint Paul exhorted his young friend Timothy to stir up the gift that was in him. The fire was banked up and smoldering when it should have been burning brightly. In not many of us is the passion for Christian service doing its best.

On all sides the motive of earnestness and diligence presses. The natural world teaches us the lesson. Every flower that blooms has its inspiration for us—we should put beauty into everything we do. Every bird that sings calls us to live more songfully and cheerfully. Every wind that blows whispers to us of the breath of God and urges us to open all our being to its blessed influence.

*“I would give up all the mind
In the prim city’s hoard can find—
House with its scrap-art bed light,
Straightened manners of the street,
Smooth-voiced society—
If so the swiftness of the wind
Might pass into my feet;*

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*If so the sweetness of the wheat
Into my soul might pass,
And the clear courage of the grass ;
If the lark carolled in my song ;
If one tithe of the faithfulness
Of the bird-mother with her brood
Into my selfish heart might press,
And make me also instinct good."*

It is true also in the realm of spiritual life that everyone has his own work allotted to him. There is something for everyone. In the building of the wall in Nehemiah's time, each man built over against his own house, and thus the entire wall was soon repaired. We will easily find our work for Christ if we will look for it right opposite our own door. We never need to journey far away to come upon it. The trouble with too many is that they pass by the work which is at their hand, not dreaming that it is the thing given to them to do, and expect to find something unusual in some unwonted place. The artist who had sought everywhere for some fit material for his Madonna found it at last

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in a common firelog in the wood-yard. Our holiest duties are always near at hand, not far off.

Then our work is not what some other one is doing, but something which is all our own. Paul illustrates this by comparing the church to a human body. There are many members in a body and each has its own distinct function. If we had only hands, or if our body were all feet or all hands, we would be only monstrosities. So if all men were fishermen or all were farmers or all were lawyers, there would be no society. In the line of spiritual work there is also the widest diversity of things to be done, and if we all had the same gift, with ability for doing just one thing, how could the great field of duty be covered? But there are diversities of gifts, so that no place shall be left unfilled, so that for no task there shall be a hand lacking. "To each one his work."

A man may not have the gift of eloquence and may almost envy another whose speech is winning. But the man of slow speech may

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have power in prayer. Adelaide Procter gives a legend of a monk who preached with great power. In those who heard, sorrow and love and good resolve awoke. A poor lay brother, sitting on the pulpit stairs, rejoiced as he saw how the eloquent words of the monk moved men. The monk himself praised God that his words were used, that hearts were melted, and lives led up to heights of loving sacrifice.

*“So prayed the monk : when suddenly he heard
An angel speaking thus : ‘ Know, O my son ;
Thy words had all been vain ; but hearts were stirred,
And saints were edified, and sinners won,
By his, the poor lay brother’s humble aid,
Who sat upon the pulpit stairs and prayed.’ ”*

We need never envy anyone the gift he possesses. That is his gift, and we have our own. Ours may not seem as great or as important as his, but that need not concern us. We are responsible only for what God has given us, and all we have to do is to make the fullest possible use of it. If another’s

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gift is more brilliant than ours, the other has a greater responsibility than we have, and we need not envy him. Besides, we do not know what particular gift is most important, what kind of work ranks highest with God or does most for the upbuilding of Christ's kingdom. Perhaps it means more to be able to pray well than to speak well. Power with God may be a mightier factor in doing good than power over men. It may be that the quietest people, who are not often heard of, who work obscurely and without fame, are quite as well known in heaven and as highly honored as those who are in conspicuous positions and receive praise from men.

We please God best and do the best work in the world when we cheerfully accept our place, however lowly, and do sweetly and as well as we can the work which God gives us to do. It ought to impart zest to the humblest calling to know that it is the will of God for us and that that and not something else is our part in the divine allotment of

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duty. There can be nothing greater in this world for anyone than the doing of God's will. We make the most of our life when we accept our own place and do well our own work. We work then with God and we shall not fail either of his help or of his reward.

*"If there be good in that I wrought,
Thy hand compelled it, Master—thine.
Where I have failed to meet thy thought,
I know, through thee, the blame is mine.*

*"One instant's toil to thee denied
Stands all eternity's offense ;
Of what I did with thee to guide,
To thee, through thee, be excellence.*

* * * * *

*"One stone the more swings to her place
In that dread temple of thy worth ;
It is enough that through thy grace
I saw naught common on thy earth."*

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*“Her prayer-books had repose,
One word her heart sufficed,
Scent of a hidden rose:
Christ!*

*“To creeds her soul was shut,
For her confession of
The Christian faith was but
Love.*

*“She craved no temple-wall.
Between the sky and sod
Her happy world was all
God.”*

CHAPTER THIRTEENTH

One Thing I Do



HERE is a great deal of waste in all lines of life, because men scatter their energies over too wide a field. Instead of doing one thing well, they do a dozen things indifferently. No one is great enough to do everything. In the arts and professions men are more and more becoming specialists. Even ordinary ability would be sure of success if it found its true place and then devoted itself wholly to its work. Though a man may fail again and again, if he persists and never becomes discouraged, he will at last succeed.

*“Blest is the man of high ideals,
Who fails to-day, to-morrow, and for days to come,
But never lowers his standards, nor surrenders to
defeat,*

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*Till hand and foot, till eye and ear,
Till vocal cord and tongue,
Till mind and heart are disciplined,
And all abilities of body and of soul
Are marshalled by the Will
And move onward to the drumbeat of perfection."*

There is a remarkable direction in our Lord's instruction to the Seventy. Among other things, he bade them salute no man by the way. The salutations of those days were tedious and required much time, and the errands on which his messengers were sent were urgent and required haste. Not a moment must be lost on the way. When a disciple begged to be allowed to bury his father before going on his errand, the Master refused the request. The dead could bury their own dead, and he must hasten to carry the gospel message.

If we would concentrate all our energies in one purpose, we should do all our work better. We would then always do our best, even in the commonest things of our daily taskwork. If we are writing only a postal-

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card to a friend, we will do it as carefully as if we were writing a letter of greatest importance. We would gather all the forces of our heart into the simplest kindness we show to anyone. There are authors who have written one or two books of great interest and value and then have grown indifferent, doing nothing more worth while. They were too well satisfied with their early success or a little praise turned their heads, and they never did their best again.

*“If at first you do succeed,
Try again !
Life is more than just one deed ;
Try again.
Never stop with what you’ve done,
More remains than you have won,
Full content’s vouchsafed to none ;
Try again !*

An old painter, after standing long in silent meditation before his canvas, with hands crossed meekly on his breast and his head bent reverently, said, “May God forgive me

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that I did not do it better." There are many of us who ought to have the same experience of penitence as we contemplate the things we have done. We should continually implore forgiveness for doing our work so poorly, for we are not doing our best. If only we would learn to put all the energy of our souls into each piece of work we do, we should make a radiant record for ourselves.

In our Christian life we should seek only one thing—the attainment of the highest reaches in character and service. If an absorbing passion for Christ ruled us, it would bring all our life into harmony with itself. A friend gave a college student a pure, inspiring and elevating picture, and asked him to hang it up in his room and keep it there for one year. The young man promised to do so. But he cared more for worldly things, for a good time, than for his studies. Then he was not as careful as he should have been about his pleasures. The friend was in the student's room one day and saw the picture

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on the wall, in a place of honor, but clustered about it were many common sporting prints, some of them of a questionable character. The beautiful picture in the center seemed strangely out of place in such unhallowed company. Yet the young man appeared entirely unaware of anything unfit in the setting, as he spoke very gratefully of his friend's beautiful gift.

Six months later, however, the friend was again in the student's room. There was the picture still in its honored place on the wall, but all the questionable prints were gone, and in place of them hung other pictures, pure, refining and beautiful, all of them in harmony with the picture in the center. The friend manifested much pleasure as he looked about the room and saw the transformation. The young man said in explanation, "You see, I couldn't leave those foolish things there beside that"—pointing to the other's gift. "The contrast was too dreadful. At first I didn't see it, but looking at your lovely picture opened my eyes to the unfitness of the

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others, and I took them all down and burned them. Then I bought other pictures to hang up in their place, but they all had to be pure and good, and in harmony with the one in the center.”

It is always thus when Christ is taken into the chief place in the life. Everything that is not in harmony with his peerless beauty must go out, and only the things that are in keeping with the mind and spirit of Christ can have a place in the life.

When Christ becomes really the one thing of our lives, there is less and less of living for self, and more and more of consecration to the service of love. Some people suppose that holiness separates a man from his fellows, that as he becomes really like Christ he grows out of touch and sympathy with people, less interested in their human affairs, less gentle, less kindly, less human, less accessible, less helpful. But it is not the religion of Christ that produces such results. Never did any other man get so near to people as Christ himself did. He lived among

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them; they loved him and trusted him, and they told him everything. When Christ truly enters a man, one of the unmistakable marks of his indwelling is the new love that begins to appear in the man's life. His religion made Saint Paul a friend of man, eager to help everyone he met. When Christ really gets possession of a heart, the sweet flowers of love begin to grow in the life. If we are not becoming more patient, more glad-hearted, more charitable, more kindly, more thoughtful, if there is not in us an increasing desire to help others, to do them good, we need to pray for more of the love of God in our hearts. We may tell people that Christ is still in this world, coming close to them in their needs, but he is here only as he lives in us. He has no other present incarnation but in the lives of his friends. He helps the suffering, the toiling folk, the hungry-hearted, the weak, the sorrowing, but only through us. We are likest to Christ when we are nearest to the hearts of men, when our sympathies are widest, when we are

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the gentlest, when our hands are readiest to minister.

If in our hearts is the great master-purpose to live for Christ only, we will grow continually away from all that is worldly and unworthy, toward things that are spiritual and divine. Saint Paul describes himself as forgetting the things that are behind and stretching forward to the things that are before. Some people never leave anything behind them. At least they forget nothing that they should forget. They never forget an injury. They never outgrow childish things.

The life that is under the full dominance and sway of Christ is ever unfolding new beauty, and growing into holier, sweeter, humaner, diviner character and into larger, fuller usefulness. For while the beauty of Christ becomes more and more manifest in the personal life, the influence of Christ is manifested more and more distinctly in the impression made on the world. If our citizenship is truly in heaven we will carry the

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atmosphere of heaven with us wherever we go, and heavenly flowers and fruits will grow about us which but for us would not have been there. There is no more infallible test of the reality and the power of our spiritual life than in the measure of heaven we bring down into this world's life. George Klinge puts this well in a little poem,

*Is the world better or worse where I tread?
What have I done in the years that are dead?
What have I left on the way as I passed—
Foiibles to perish, or blessings to last?
Whose is the love-voice I hear as I go?
Whom do I follow through weal and through woe?
Of what is my sword-blade—of gold or of dross?
What is my standard—the world or the cross?
How do I choose when the heart's sacred cry
Crosses the will of my Christ?—bid it die?
What do I do when the world's flowers are sweet—
Stop in my race for the flowers at my feet?
Where are my scars from—siege upon siege,
Loyally fought in the cause of my liege?
What is my watchword, my passport, to show
The cause I contend for, the way that I go?*

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*Are my steps onward, forever ahead,
Never turned back to some hope sin has fed?
Am I a soldier, and what is my aim?
Have I left in my footprints the light of Christ's
name?*

At Thy Word, I Will

*So oft the doing of God's will
Our foolish ways undoeth!
And yet what idle dream breaks ill
Which morning light subdueth?
And who would murmur and misdoubt,
When God's great sunrise finds him out?*

—E. B. BROWNING.

CHAPTER FOURTEENTH

At Thy Word, I Will



HE divine will settles everything of duty. When we know surely what our Master would have us do, there is no longer the slightest question as to what we should do. All we have to do then is to obey. We have nothing to do with the expediency or the in expediency of the command, with the determining of its wisdom or unwisdom, with the question of its possibility or impossibility.

When the Master bade Peter push out into the deep and let down his nets for a draught, the old fisherman promptly answered, "At thy word, I will." He had learned the first lesson in discipleship—prompt, cheerful, unquestioning obedience. According to ordinary fishing rules nothing would come from obeying this command. Yet Peter did not

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think of that. The word of the Master had supreme authority with him. It could not possibly be mistaken. No appeal from it was to be considered for a moment. So Peter answered unhesitatingly, "At thy word, I will." Peter's example is to be followed in every case by the Master's friends. The question of human judgment or opinion is not to be considered when Christ speaks. The best human wisdom is fallible and may easily be mistaken. Men in authority may make mistakes of judgment by which those who are required to follow their direction shall be compelled to suffer harm or loss. On a battlefield a general's mistake may result in the sacrifice of many lives. Somebody blundered and the six hundred rode into the valley of death. Ofttimes bad advice has wrecked destinies. Even those who love us most truly may err in the counsel they give us, and may lead us into paths which are not good.

Many people suffer from the ignorance of those whom they trust as guides. But in Jesus Christ we have a Leader who never

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errs in wisdom. He never gives wrong advice. He is never mistaken in his decision as to what we ought to do. We are absolutely sure that his commands are both right and wise. Our own opinion and judgment may be against what he bids us do. It may seem to us from the human and earthly side that the course on which he is taking us can lead only to disaster. In such cases, it is an immeasurable comfort to us to know that his biddings are always absolutely infallible. When he bids us cast our nets in any particular place, we may be perfectly sure that we shall draw them up full.

Many of the things our Master calls us to do or to endure, do not seem to our eyes at the time the best things. Much of our life is disappointment. Sorrow comes oftentimes with its hot tears, its emptyings of the heart, its pain and bitterness. We do not know, when we set out on any bright, sunny path, into what experiences we shall be led. About a dozen years ago, a noble young man married a sweet, beautiful girl. They were very

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happy. Life began for them in a garden of roses. Only three bright years had passed, however, when the young wife broke down in health. She has been an invalid ever since, much of the time unable to leave her room. The burden has been a very heavy one for the husband, requiring continual self-denial and sacrifice, besides the grief and anxiety it has brought.

That was not the life these two dreamed of on their wedding morning. They thought only of gladness and prosperity. It never occurred to them that sickness or any trouble could break into their paradise. But the Master has made no mistake. Even already, to those who have watched their lives and noted the fruit of the suffering in them, it is becoming apparent that love and goodness are written in all the painful lines of the long story. The young man has been growing all the years in strength, in gentleness, in purity of spirit, in self-control, in the peace of God, and in all manly qualities. It seemed a strange place to bid him cast his nets—

At Thy Word, I Will

into the deep waters of disappointment—but he is now drawing them full of rich blessing and good.

Here is another story of wedded life. A gentle girl was married to a young man of much promise. But soon the bright promise faded. The prosperous circumstances which it was thought were secure against any possible vicissitude were suddenly interrupted and the accumulation of years, the fruit of hard toil, was gone. Then the husband's health failed and times of pinching want followed. The young wife has had little in these years but trial and sorrow.

There are those who would question the wisdom of the Master in leading her into all this experience of pain and suffering. We cannot understand it. We cannot read the divine love in the strange writing, yet we know that the words really must spell love as the angels read them. To infinite wisdom, the way of sorrow seemed the best way for the adorning, the enriching, the ennobling and the perfecting of that beautiful life. Sunshine is not

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all the fields and gardens need to make them beautiful; they must have clouds and rain as well, or they would be parched and withered. It is so also with human lives. Prosperity and happiness are not the only experiences that bring blessing.

*“Is it raining, little flower?
Be glad of rain.
Too much sun would wither thee;
'Twill shine again.
The sky is very black, 'tis true;
But just behind it shines the blue.”*

*“Art thou weary, tender heart?
Be glad of pain!
In sorrow sweetest things will grow
As flowers in rain.
God watches; and thou wilt have the sun,
When clouds their perfect work have done.”*

We may always say to Christ, whatever his bidding may be, whatever he asks us to do or to suffer, into whatsoever mystery or trial or pand he may lead us, “At thy word, I will.” There need never be any smallest exception

At Thy Word, I Will

to this obedience. Though to our narrow, limited vision it seems that only hurt and loss can come to us out of the experience, still we may heed and obey the voice that calls and commands, knowing that in spite of all seeming ill, there must be blessing and good in the end. We need never question the divine wisdom. Who are we that we could know better than God what we need, what will bring to us the truest good? Always God's will is perfect, and we may implicitly, unquestioningly, accept it, knowing that the outcome will be blessing.

This makes the way of life very plain and simple. We have only one thing to do—to obey Christ. In whatever way his will is made known to us, whether in his word, through our own consciences, or in his providences, we have but to accept it and do it. It may mean the setting aside of cherished plans, the giving up of things that are dearest to us, a life of pain and suffering, but in any case it is ours to obey without question. Then we may fix it unalterably in our belief

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that there never can be any mistake in our Master's guidance. Obedience always leads to blessing. It cannot be otherwise, since God is God and his name is love. Christ cannot fail to keep his smallest word. The universe would fall to wreck if he did. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away." Some day we shall know that the end of all our Lord's commands, all his leadings, is good. The truth is put well in the oft-quoted lines,

*"Sometime, when all life's lessons have been learned
And sun and stars forevermore have set,
The things which our weak judgments here have
spurned,
The things o'er which we grieved with lashes wet,
Will flash before us, out of life's dark night,
As stars shine most in deeper tints of blue;
And we shall see how all God's plans are right,
And how what seemed reproof was love most true.*

*"Then be content, poor heart,
God's plans like lilies pure and white unfold.
We must not tear the close-shut leaves apart,
Time will reveal the calyxes of gold,*

At Thy Word, I Will

*And if, through patient toil, we reach the land
Where tired feet, with sandals loosed, may rest,
When we shall clearly see and understand,
I know that we will say, 'God knew the best.'"*

The Duty of Pleasing Others

*“They are such little, simple things to do,—
To sweep a room, to bake a loaf of bread,
Kiss a hurt finger, tie a baby’s shoe,
To mend a crying schoolboy’s broken sled,—*

*“Such little, simple things! but they above
Who on our little world attendant wait,
And joyful wait, note only if through love
The deed be done to count the work as great.”*

CHAPTER FIFTEENTH

The Duty of Pleasing Others



SOME persons are not accustomed to think of pleasing others as a duty. We have been trained to think of what is right and just in our relations to others, without reference to the effect our words or conduct may have upon them. But there is no reason why we should not do the things that are right and at the same time seek to please those with whom we are dealing. Saint Paul says, "Let each one of us please his neighbor for that which is good, unto edifying." We are to please our neighbor for his good. We must not think of gratifying his whims, of feeding his vanity, or of nourishing his self-conceit. This would not be to "please him for that which is good." A great many people are hurt irreparably by insincere flattery. They may be pleased in

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a sense, but it is not for their good. They are puffed up by it, encouraged to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. We can do no greater unkindness to another than to stimulate his self-conceit. Yet one of the temptations of good nature is to be insincere and even untruthful in commending others.

But it is not this kind of pleasing that Saint Paul had in mind. It must be for the person's good, his growth in character, and then it must be genuine and altogether true. The duty of pleasing others is part of the great lesson of love. If we love our neighbor we will desire to give him pleasure, to make him happy. We get the lesson from our Master, and in his life love blossomed out in all its perfection. Christ never sacrificed truth, was never insincere, and yet his speaking to men was always marked by kindness. He was never brusque in his speech. He never lost his temper nor spoke in anger. He reproved men's sins and faults, but when he did this his tones were quiet and his voice was full of love.

The Duty of Pleasing Others

If we love others as Christ loves them, we will seek always to please them. We will never speak superciliously. We will never reveal vanity or self-conceit in our intercourse with those about us. There is a way of criticising and reproving that is offensive and impertinent. Love gives us no right to judge and condemn. It does not authorize us to watch others or to treat them censoriously. If we have love in our hearts we will seek to save others from sin, to restrain them from wrongdoing, but we will do even these services in lowliness and love, so as to win and not to lose those we reprove. Humility will mark our every word and act. We will always be gentle and kind, speaking in love when we must say anything unpleasant, anything that will give pain.

Another reason we should seek to please others is that everyone needs encouragement and cheer. It is possible for us so to bear ourselves in our relations to others as to make life harder for them. On the other hand, we have the power of adding immeasurably to

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the strength, the cheer, and the energy of others about us. Words of encouragement are wondrous inspirations. An artist said that his mother's kiss made him a painter. That is, when she saw his crude work and thought she detected in it indications of genius, instead of laughing at what he had done, she kissed her boy with encouragement and gave him an impulse which sent him on his way with energy and hope.

But children are not the only persons who need encouragement and are pleased and helped by words of appreciation. We never get too old or too high up in our work to be cheered and stimulated by sincere commendation. When we read a book that helps us, no matter how distinguished the author may be, we will please him and do him a real kindness if we will write him a few words of grateful recognition, telling him how his book has helped us. When the preacher has spoken earnestly and his words have given us cheer, or comfort, light on some dark problem, or help in some perplexity, however great he may

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be, however praised among men, a word of encouragement from the humblest person in his audience will send a glow of warmth and cheer into his heart—pleasing him for his good.

It is of the good of the person we are to think. Edifying means building up. This is always the motive of love. Envy seeks to harm another, to take away from his honor, to check him in his progress, to tear down what he has built up. But love thinks always of the good of the person, and of how his best interests may be advanced. We have an errand to everyone whose life we touch. We are sent from God with a blessing to him. We may not know what our mission is, what the good is that we are to do for him, but love will find something to do for him which will make him a better and a happier man. The true Christian way of relating ourselves to those about us is this—to be ready always to give any help that may be needed.

The idea of help does not have in mind merely material aid. Ofttimes the last thing we

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should do for one in need is to help him by relieving him of his load, by doing the hard task for him, by giving him money. In the miracle at the Beautiful Gate the apostles had no money to give, but what they gave was better than money. We must not think that none need love's ministries but those who are in some physical distress or in some great sorrow. Many who reveal no tokens of suffering are yet sufferers. Grief does not always wear weeds of mourning. There are hungry-hearted ones who need love and sympathy. There are those who are misunderstood, to whom a word of confidence would impart strength. There are discouraged people to whom a glad, welcoming face is a heavenly benediction, full of inspiration for them.

We cannot estimate the value of our influence as helpers of those who need help. We must seek to please them in ways that will make them stronger, truer, better. There is a great deal of unfit comforting of others by those who think only of pleasing, not of

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helping. There is a kind of sympathy which only makes one weaker and less able to endure. The word comfort means to strengthen. We have comforted a sorrowing one only when we have made him stronger. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. The name means one who stands by another. Standing by means comradeship. We may not give the person anything. We may not do anything at all which can be regarded as a favor, but the mere fact of our standing by him in strong friendship is of incalculable value to him. That was what Jesus hoped of his friends in Gethsemane. They could not help him in any way—he must drink the cup himself; but if they were near by him in love and companionship, this alone would make him stronger.

Our helping of others must not be too insistent. We must respect the individuality of those to whom we would be friends. There is danger that even love will be officious sometimes, and reveal its eagerness in ways which will take away much of its value. People do

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not like to be helped in a conscious or professional way. The help must be the help of love itself and must be given simply, quietly, gently, unostentatiously. It must never intermeddle. When we stand by one who is in sorrow, the fewer words we speak the better. There is altogether too much talking in many cases by those who are sincerely eager to help. The best service we can give to those who are in grief is to lead them into the presence of Christ and leave them there alone with him.

A strong, quiet face, telling of peace and joy in the heart, is in itself a benediction. On the other hand, a gloomy and discouraged face hurts everyone who looks upon it, leaves a shadow upon other lives, and makes them a little less fit for the struggles, the tasks, and the duties before them.

If we are wise, we will avoid all display in efforts to please others. We will simply seek to be our natural selves, with sincere love, with patience, thoughtfulness, and kindness in our spirits. We will not talk about it—

The Duty of Pleasing Others

talking about it spoils everything. The best good is done always when we wist not that we are doing good. The greatest help is given to others when they wist not that they are being helped.

The Duchess of Kent was a richly endowed woman and was universally beloved. Once the Princess Alice, herself simple, sweet and unspoiled, asked her: "What makes everyone love to be with you? I am always so sorry to have to leave you, and so are all the others who come here. What is the secret, grand-mamma?"

It was not easy for the noble woman to answer such a personal question. But it was important that it should be answered for the sake of her who had asked it and who was indeed hungry to know the secret. So the noble lady gave this memorable answer:

"I was early instructed that the way to make people happy was to appear interested in the things that interested them, namely, their own affairs; and that this could be accomplished only by burying one's own grief, an-

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noyance, satisfaction, or joy completely out of sight. Forgetfulness of one's own concerns, my dear, a smiling face, a word of sympathy or unselfish help, where it is possible to give it, will always make others happy, and the giver equally so."

The Privilege of Suffering
Wrongfully

*There was a scar on yonder mountain-side,
Gashed out where once the cruel storm had trod;
A barren, desolate chasm, reaching wide
Across the soft green sod.*

*But years crept by beneath the purple pines,
And veiled the scar with grass and moss once more,
And left it fairer now with flowers and vines
Than it had been before.*

*There was a wound once in a gentle heart,
Whence all life's sweetness seemed to ebb and die;
And love's confiding changed to bitter smart,
While slow, sad years went by.*

*Yet as they passed, unseen an angel stole,
And laid a balm of healing on the pain,
Till love grew purer in the heart made whole,
And peace came back again.*

—MABEL EARLE.

CHAPTER SIXTEENTH

The Privilege of Suffering Wrongfully



ONE of the most difficult duties of Christian life is to endure wrong patiently and sweetly. Yet many persons have to learn the lesson. There are none who do not, sometime or other, suffer unjustly. Strength ought to be gentle, but there are strong men who use their strength brutally. Power ought to be paternal, but there are those possessing power who exercise it tyrannically. Justice is not a universal quality among men. There are many who are misjudged or misunderstood. There are those who for kindness receive unkindness. There are those who repay self-sacrifice and love with ingratitude and neglect. There are good men who suffer for their goodness.

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Much of our Master's teaching has to do with this experience. One of the Beatitudes tells of the blessedness of the meek, those who endure wrong patiently, without complaining. Another tells of the happiness or blessedness of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. In another teaching the Master bids us turn the other cheek to him who smites us on one, to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us. The lesson of the forgiveness of injuries and of all wrongs done to us is taught over and over again, and to make it still more emphatic and essential is linked with the divine forgiveness of us, so that we cannot ask God to forgive us without at the same time solemnly pledging ourselves to forgive those who sin against us.

All our Lord's lessons he lived himself, illustrating them in his own obedience. We say we want to be like Christ, to live as he lived. When we begin to think what this means we shall find that a large part of Christ's life was the enduring of wrong. He was never

Of Suffering Wrongfully

welcome in this world. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." He was the love of God incarnate, coming to men with mercy and with heavenly gifts, only to be rejected and to have the door shut in his face. The enmity deepened as the days passed, until at the last he was nailed on a cross. Yet we know how our Master bore all this wrong and injury. On his trial, under false accusation, he held his peace, answering nothing to the charges made against him. On the cross his anguish found vent not in imprecations upon his enemies, nor even in outcries of pain, but in a prayer of love, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

There was not a moment in all our Lord's life when there was the slightest bitterness of feeling in his breast. No resentment ever found an instant's lodgment in his heart. His answer to all the unkindness, the enmity, the plottings, the denials, the treason, and to all the cruelty, the brutal accusations, and the terrible wrongs inflicted upon him, was—love.

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Thus it is that we should bear all that is unjust, unkind and wrong in the treatment that we receive from others. We are to keep love in our hearts through it all. A summer tourist writes of a spring as sweet as any that ever gushed from the sunny hillsides, which one day he found by the sea, when the tide had ebbed away. Then the sea rolled in and poured its bitter floods over the little spring, hiding it out of sight, wrapping it in a shroud of brackish waters. But when the tide ebbed away again the spring was still pouring up its sweet stream, with no taste of the sea's bitterness in it. Such a spring should the love in our hearts be. Though floods of unkindness and of wrong pour over us, however cruelly we may be treated by the world, and whatever unkindness or injustice we may have to endure from others, the well of love in our bosom should never retain a trace of the bitterness, but should be always sweet.

The world cannot harm us if we thus live. The things that hurt and scar our lives are re-

Of Suffering Wrongfully

sentment, unforgivingness, bitter feeling, desire for revenge. Men may beat us until all our bones are broken, but if love fails not in our hearts meanwhile, we have come through the experience unharmed, with no marks of injury upon us. One writing of a friend who was dreadfully hurt in a runaway accident says that the woman will be probably scarred for life, and then goes on to speak of the wondrous patience in her suffering and of the peace of God that failed not in her heart for a moment. The world may hurt our bodies, but if we suffer as Christ suffered there will be no trace of scarring or wounding in our inner life.

We may learn from our Master how to endure wrong so as not to be hurt by it. "When he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." He did not take the righting of his wrongs into his own hands. He had power and could have summoned legions of angels to fight for him, but he did not lift a finger in his own defence. When Pilate spoke to Jesus of his

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power to crucify or release him, Jesus said, "Thou wouldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above." God could build a wall of granite about us, if he would, so that no enemy can touch us. He could shield us so that no power on earth can do us any hurt. He could deliver us from every enemy. We should remember when we are suffering injury or injustice at the hand of others, that God could have prevented it. He could have held back the hand that it should not touch us. He could have ordered that no harm should be done to us, that we should suffer no injury.

This wrong that you are suffering, whatever it is, is therefore from God, something he permits to come to you. It is not an accident, a lawless occurrence, something that has broken away from the divine control, something that God could not prevent breaking into your life. In nature not a drop of water in the wildest waves of the sea ever gets away from the leash of law. Law reigns everywhere, in things small and great.

Of Suffering Wrongfully

*“The very law that molds a tear
And bids it trickle from its source ;
That law preserves the earth a sphere,
And guides the planets in their course.”*

The same is as true of events, of men's actions, as it is of matter. God's hand is in all things. Some one oppresses you, deals with you unjustly. God permits it, and this means that a good, a blessing, shall come out of the suffering. It may be a good for you. What you are called to endure may be designed to make you better, holier, richer in life and character, gentler-spirited, more patient. It is well for us to think of this when a wrong has been done to us by another. We may leave to God the matter of the evil committed against us. It is against him far more than against us, and he will judge in the matter. Our only concern should be to get the lesson or the good there is in it for ourselves.

Or the suffering we have to endure may be for the sake of others. God permitted the terrible crime against his Son for the good

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of the world. Human redemption came out of it. When he permits us to suffer for righteousness' sake, we are in a little measure sharing the sufferings of Christ, and out of it all will come something to make the world better. Saint Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ. When some one has treated us unkindly, wrongfully, it is a comfort to think that in a small way, at least, we are being crucified with Christ and that blessing and enriching will come to the world from our suffering.

We dread suffering in any form. It seems to us something evil which can only work harm. Yet the truth is that many of God's best benedictions and holiest mercies come to us in the garb of pain. We dread especially the suffering that men's wrong or cruelty brings upon us. We resent it. But no other experience brings us so fully into companionship with Christ, for all that he suffered was unjust, and out of his untold sufferings have come all the hopes, joys and blessings of our lives.

Of Suffering Wrongfully

When a great building was to be erected, an artist begged to be permitted to make one of the doors. If this could not be granted, he asked that he might make one little panel of one of the doors. Or if this, too, were denied him, he craved that he might, at least, be permitted to hold the brushes for the artist to whom the honor of doing the work should be awarded. If so small a part in a work of earth were esteemed so high a privilege, it is a far higher honor to have even the least share with Christ in his great work of human redemption. Everyone who suffers any wrong patiently and sweetly, in love and trust, is working with Christ in the saving of the world.

The Duty Waiting Without

*The woman singeth at her spinning-wheel
A pleasant chant, ballad, or barcarolle;
She thinketh of her song, upon the whole,
Far more than of the flax; and yet the reel
Is full, and artfully her fingers feel
With quick adjustment, provident control,
The lines, too subtly twisted to unroll,
Out to a perfect thread; I hence appeal
To the dear Christian Church—that we may do
Our Father's business in these temples mirk,
Thus swift and steadfast; thus intent and strong
While thus, apart from toil, our souls pursue
Some high, calm, spheric tune, and prove our
work
The better for the sweetness of our song.*

—MRS. BROWNING.

CHAPTER SEVENTEENTH

The Duty Waiting Without



IT was a glorious privilege for the disciples to be with their Master on the Holy Mount. They carried the impression of the Transfiguration in their hearts as long as they lived. Peter would have stayed there, and wanted to build tabernacles for the Master and for the visitants from heaven. . He tells us in his own narrative in Mark's Gospel, that he did not know what to say. When we do not know what to say we would better keep quiet. But Peter had not learned to do this—he thought he must always be saying something, and of necessity he said some things he would better not have said.

Peter could not have kept the heavenly messengers in the little booths made of branches which he wanted to set up. They were no

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longer of the earth and could not now dwell in houses made with hands. They had been for centuries in the spirit-world and could not have resumed again the narrow limitations of a booth of boughs or even of a palace. Besides, Moses and Elijah had not come to earth to stay. They had been sent only on an errand of love to the Master, as he was setting out for his cross. They had come to cheer and encourage him. Their errand needed but a brief time, and when it was finished they hastened back into heaven. A little later the disciples "lifted up their eyes, and saw no one, save Jesus only." No tabernacles, though built of earth's finest materials, could have kept those holy ones on the earth an hour after their sacred mission was accomplished. Peter's wish was vain.

Nor would it have been possible to keep Jesus on the mount. Work was waiting for him that very hour at the foot of the mountain. A father was there with his demoniac boy. For Jesus to have stayed in the tabernacle which Peter wished to build for him there

The Duty Waiting Without

amid the glory would have been to neglect the call of human need, in order to enjoy spiritual pleasure himself—and this was never Christ's way. Then he was just setting out on his last journey, at the end of which stood the cross. Not even the bliss of heavenly communion could keep him from the work and the suffering before him. To keep the Master on the Mount of Transfiguration would have been to hold him back from his mission. This no constraint could have done, for he had come only to do his Father's will and to redeem the world.

For the disciples, too, there was work waiting. They had duties to perform. They needed further preparation for their great work, and then they were to be sent out to win the world for their Lord.

Devotion is not all of a holy life. It would be very sweet to stay on holy mountains with Christ and not return again to the world of toil and struggle, but that is not the purpose of our redemption. We are to pray and commune with our Master. We are to sit

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down at his table and enjoy the rapture of his love and the joy of his presence. But we are not to build tabernacles and stay there. We are to go quickly from the closet of devotion, out into the wide field, where a sinning, suffering, sorrowing world needs us, that we may carry to men the blessings which we have received.

Indeed, the purpose of devotion and communion is not personal enjoyment, not even purest spiritual ecstasy, as a final end; it is preparation for service. The Transfiguration experience was not meant merely to warm hearts and kindle the fires of worship—it was to help the Master to go on along his steep, rough way to the cross; it was to strengthen the disciples' faith in their Lord and in his divine mission. No spiritual rapture is ever intended to end with itself—it is to send us out to do something for the world.

No vision of Christ granted to us is meant to exhaust itself in the bliss it brings—it fulfills its purpose only when its fervor makes us love Christ more intensely and enter into

The Duty Waiting Without

his service with new enthusiasm and energy. A philosopher when he had kindled a fire on a cold day and had been warmed by it, would call himself before the bar of conscience and ask, "What did you do when you were warm?" He felt that the comfort he had received demanded some service to others in return. Every earthly comfort we enjoy should put into us a new impulse of helpfulness, if we are living rightly. Especially is this true of every spiritual comfort, every ecstasy that thrills our hearts while we worship, every feeling of warmth produced by the divine love shed abroad in us by the Holy Spirit.

We love our church services. We enjoy the fellowship. We are glad to sing together, to pray together, to worship together. That is well. But what do we do when we are warmed? What is the fruit, the outcome of our enjoyment? While we are at our worship, singing our hymns of love, looking at the glory of the face of Christ, our hearts aglow with adoration, there are lost ones in

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homes all along our streets ; there are sorrowing ones, needing our sympathy, our comfort, the touch of our hand ; there are tempted ones almost yielding, almost falling away into eternal death, whom we may hearten and rescue. Let us not forget that the purpose of the blessing that comes to us in our devotions does not end with itself, is not meant merely to warm and gladden us, but to send us out to become a greater blessing to others. What are we doing with the heavenly gifts God is sending to us? If we are doing nothing with them, if we do not go out from our enjoyment to be a blessing to others, we are missing the blessing it was meant we should receive. George Macdonald says :

*Go thou into thy closet ; shut thy door ;
And pray to him in secret ; he will hear.*

The closet is where we meet God. It is the Holy of holies. But it is not the only place to worship God—no true worship ever ends there. Besides, we worship that we may be

The Duty Waiting Without

ready to serve. So the call comes to him who is enjoying the rapture of communion:

“Hark, hark, a voice amid the quiet intense!

It is thy duty waiting thee without.

Rise from thy knees in hope, the half of doubt;

A hand doth pull thee—it is Providence;

Open thy door straightway and get thee hence;

Go forth into the tumult and the shout;

Work, love, with workers, lovers, all about.”

There is a time for waiting, for meditation, for fellowship, for prayer. But that is not all of religion. We have the vision that we may take up the task. We are saved that we may serve. We are left in this world that we may make the world better. We enjoy transfiguration visions that we may be transfigured ourselves and shine in the darkness about us. We have our hearts warmed with the love of Christ, that we may go out to be the love of Christ to others.

In a cottage in Scotland, framed in glass, is a withered rose which money could not buy. A boy died far away in the south of France

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where he had gone to seek health. Henry Drummond heard of the boy's death, and, when in that region, went to his grave and picked a rose blooming on it and sent it to the boy's mother. Drummond was always doing such kindly things. In his diary he wrote:

*Holiness is infinite compassion for others ;
Happiness is a great love and much serving.*

There is not one of us who may not go out from any religious service, any hour of devotion, ready to make others stronger. People are looking to us for strength, for comfort, for food for their hunger. We do not know what we are to others—to weak ones, to timid souls, to tempted ones, to sorrowing ones, to lonely ones, how much they need us, how they depend on us, how we may help them. One writes to another:

*I wish that I might tell you what you are
To me—you seem so fine and strong and true,
So bold, and yet so gentle, so apart
From petty strivings that confuse men's minds.*

The Duty Waiting Without

*I wish that I might make you understand
How your clean, brave young life has made me brave,
How I am cheered and strengthened and upheld,
When I consider that the world holds you
A hero ; in a world of false ideals
Your truth, your worth, has blazed its own brave way.
Yes, I would have you know this, know how dear
My heart holds what you stand for, for I fear
You might do something that you might not do,
My dream's embodiment, if you but knew.*

We do not know how other lives may be hurt if we show any lack of the spirit of Christ. The world needs our best life, our bravest words, our noblest heroisms, our tenderest love, our most self-forgetful help. Let us rest in the tenderness of the love of Christ until our lives glow with its blessed warmth, and then go out to be Christ to others.

We need communings with Christ to get our visions of duty, our ideals for life. But we must be ready then to go down into the deepest valleys, among the sorest human needs, even where sin is doing its worst, to do the lowest tasks and the most distasteful duties.

The Thanksgiving Habit

*“My home is not so great ;
But open heart I keep.
The sorrows come to me,
That they may sleep.*

*“The little bread I have
I share, and gladly pray
To-morrow may give more,
To give away.*

*“Yes, in the dark sometimes
The childish fear will haunt :
How long, how long, before
I die of want ?*

*“But all the bread I have
I share, and ever say,
To-morrow shall bring more
To give away.”*

CHAPTER EIGHTEENTH

The Thanksgiving Habit



THE annual Thanksgiving day in America has grown to be a great national festival. It is a day of rejoicing. It summons all the people to gratitude.

It is fitting that a people who have received untold blessings should set apart one day on which all should recall their mercies, think of God as the Giver of all and express their grateful feelings in words of praise.

But it is not intended that the other three hundred and sixty-four days shall be empty of gladness because one is named as an especial day of rejoicing. We cannot crowd into any one day all the praises of a year. Indeed on no one day can we be grateful for another day. No one person can give thanks for a whole company of people. So no one day can be glad for any but itself. All the

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days should be thanksgiving days. Any that are not lack something, and stand as imperfect days in the calendar. We are told that we may count that day lost in which we do no kindness to anyone. In like manner may be set down as a lost day that one in which no songs of gratitude rise from our hearts and lips to God.

Anybody can be thankful on one day of the year. At least, it ought to be possible for even the most gloomy and pessimistic person to rouse up to grateful feeling on the high tide of an annual Thanksgiving day. No doubt, it is something to pipe even one little song in a whole year of discontent and complaining—the kind of living with which some people fill their years. God must be pleased to have some people grateful even for a few moments in a long period of time, and to hear them sing even once in a year. But that is not the way he would have us live. The ideal life is one that is always thankful, not only for a little moment on a particularly fine day. “Praise is comely,” that is, beautiful—beau-

The Thanksgiving Habit

tiful to God. The life which pleases him is the one which always rejoices.

Nowhere in the Bible can we find either ingratitude or joylessness commanded or commended. All ungrateful feelings and dispositions are condemned. A great deal is said in disapproval of murmuring, discontent, worrying, and all forms of ingratitude. Again and again we are taught that joy is the keynote of a true life. It is not enough to rejoice when the sun shines, when all things are going well with us, when we are in the midst of prosperity; we are to rejoice as well when clouds hide the blue sky, when our circumstances seem to be adverse, or when we are passing through sufferings. In one of the Psalms, the writer says:

*“I will bless Jehovah at all times;
His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

He had learned to sing in the hours of pain as well as in the times of gladness. That is the way the Christian should do—nothing

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should hush his song or choke the voice of thanksgiving and praise.

The only way to get thanksgiving into its true place in our lives is to have it grow into a habit. A habit is a well-worn path. There was a first step over the course, breaking the way. Then a second person, finding the prints of feet, walked in them. A third followed, then a fourth, until at length there was a beaten path, and now thousands go upon it. One who has been full of miserable discontents, utterly lacking in gratitude, gets a new divine impulse, and one day is really grateful for a few moments. The impulse comes again, and again he lets his life flow toward gratitude. Persisting in the disposition, his heart returns again and again to its gladness, until by and by it has been lured altogether away from the old beaten paths of discontent, discouragement, and unhappiness, and runs always in the ways of gladness.

If we find that we have been leaving thanksgiving out of our lives, if we have been allowing ourselves to grumble instead of praise,

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if we have indulged in unhappiness instead of in gladness, we should instantly set about the breaking of a new path, a thanksgiving path. It will not be easy at first, for gloomy dispositions when long indulged persist in staying in our lives. But they can be conquered, and we should not pause in our effort until we have trained ourselves entirely away from everything that is cheerless and ungrateful, into the ways of joy and song.

There are many encouragements to a life of thanksgiving. For one thing, it makes life much happier. The person who indulges in fretting and complaining is missing much that is loveliest, both in character and in experience. The tendency of such a life is toward gloom and depression, and these qualities in the heart soon show themselves on the face and in the manner. Light is the emblem of a beautiful life, but ingratitude is darkness rather than light. If we would be happy we must train ourselves to be grateful. Ingratitude makes life dreary for us.

Another reason for cultivating the thanksgiving-

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ing spirit is because of its influence on others. Nobody loves a sullen person. We are exhorted to think of "whatsoever things are lovely," and cheerlessness is not lovely. If we would have people like us, if we would attract them to us and have good influence over them, we must cultivate happiness in all our expressions. There are many people who have formed the habit of unhappiness. They may be good and honest, but they have not learned the lesson of gladness. And they are not helpful people. They are not diffusers of joy.

We are as responsible for our faces as we are for our dispositions. If we go about with gloom on our countenances, we will cast shadows over others and make life harder for them. No one can be a real blessing to others until he has mastered his gloom and has attained the thanksgiving face. No one can be of very much help to others if he carries discontent and anxiety on his countenance. We owe it to our friends, therefore, as well as to ourselves, to form the habit of thanksgiving.

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There are those who have learned this lesson so well that wherever they go they make happiness. Their lives are benedictions. One writes to such a friend a birthday letter:

*This is your birthday. On the calendars
Of those who know you it is marked with gold,
As both a holy and a holiday.
You make us happy, and you make us good,
By simply being with you. You bestow,
And think you are receiving; like a rose
That marvels at the fragrance of the breeze.
We are most glad, since you were sent to earth
It was while we are here; not hastened down
To shine amidst the shadows of the past,
Nor kept to brace some joyful future day,
But come to share our present as it is,
And leave to-morrow better for your stay.*

It ought not to be hard to train one's self to be grateful. There would seem to be reason enough in every life for continual thanksgiving. True, there are days when things may seem to go wrong, but it is only in the seeming. There is no doubt that all our circumstances bring blessings which we may have if

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we will. The hardest experience of any day enfolds in it a gift from God, if only we receive it in faith and love. We think of the sunny days as being good days, and we call unpleasant weather bad. But if we understood it, we should know that God sends to the earth just as rich blessings in his clouds as he does in his sunshine. The clouds bring rain, and after the rain all nature appears clothed in fresh beauty. A simple, childlike faith sees God in everything, and is ready always to give cheerful thanks, even when the reason for the thanksgiving may not be apparent.

Indeed, we shall some day see that many of the richest and best blessings of our lives have come to us through experiences and circumstances which to us seemed adverse, and from which we shrank. There is an old promise which says that to them that love God all things work together for good. All we have to make sure of is that we keep ourselves in the love of God. If we do this, everything that comes to us will bring its

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enriching in some way, and out of the painful things of our lives we will gather the best blessings and the deepest joys.

Then we shall not have many miles at the most of the rough, steep road. In a few years we shall have gone over it all and shall have come out into a place where there shall be nothing to vex or disturb us. And such gladness waits for us, such blessing, that one hour there will make us forget all the sorrow and pain and toil of the way.

*“’Tis a long road home ;
But sleep for aching eyes,
Rest for weary feet,
For striving hearts a prize,
Silence still and sweet,
Wait at the end of the long road home.*

*“’Tis a hard road home ;
Many faint and lag
Beneath the heavy pack,
With feet and hearts that drag,
But none looks back—
We know there’s an end to the hard road home.*

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*“Tis a dark road home,
With shadows long and deep,
Where timid travellers fall,
And scarce their path may keep;
But the Light that shines for all
Gleams at the end of the dark road home.”*

“Because He Are Strong”

*“Because I spent the strength thou gavest me
In struggle which thou never didst ordain,
And have but dregs of life to offer thee,
O Lord, I do repent, I do repent.”*

*“Because I was impatient, would not wait,
But thrust my impious hands across thy threads,
And marred the pattern drawn out for my life,
O Lord, I do repent, I do repent.”*

*“Because thou hast borne with me all this while,
Hast smitten me with love until I weep,
Hast called me as a mother calls her child,
O Lord, I do repent, I do repent.”*

CHAPTER NINETEENTH

“Because Ye Are Strong”



T used to be a custom for travellers in Switzerland to bring home clusters of the edelweiss. The flower is not sought because of its beauty or for its fragrance, but in recognition of its bravery and victoriousness in living and blooming under hard conditions. It grows on the Alps and Pyrenees, at lofty altitudes, where almost nothing else lives, and on crags difficult of access, and is among the hardiest of all plants. Thus the edelweiss becomes the symbol of noble life that endures hardness, that is victorious amid antagonisms, that rises superior to obstacles.

The man who has never known a hardship, who never has had to practise self-denial or make a personal sacrifice, may be the envy of other men whose lives have been one con-

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tinued struggle. They may think that if they could have had his easy circumstances they could have made a great deal more of their life. But really their chance in life thus far has been far better than his. Manhood is made in the field of struggle and hardship, not in ways of ease and luxury. Hindrances are opportunities. Difficulty is a school for manhood.

Strength is the glory of manhood. Yet it is not easy to be strong—it is easier to be weak and to drift. It is easier for the boy in school not to work hard to get his lessons, but to let them go, and then at the last depend on some other boy to help him through. It is easier, when something happens to make you irritable just to fly into a temper and say bitter words, than it is to keep quiet and self-controlled. It is easier, when you are with other young people and they are about to do something that you know to be unworthy, just to go with them, than it is to say, "I cannot do this wickedness against God." It is easier to be weak than to be

“Because Ye Are Strong”

strong. But we know where weakness leads in the end.

Nothing is impossible to young men. General Armstrong said, “Doing what can’t be done is the glory of living.” Anybody can do the easy things, the things that can be done. A young man who has no higher goal than the things he knows he can do, will never rise to any sublime height. “What are Christians put into the world for but to do the impossible in the strength of God?” said General Armstrong again. Jesus said the same—that if we have faith we can remove mountains—that is, do things that are impossible to human strength, because faith unites us to God and his omnipotence works then in us and with us. God expects a great deal of those who are strong. He does not expect much of babies, of invalids, of paralytics, or of feeble-minded people; but young men have in them vast possibilities of power. Is it manly not to use this power for God, for country, for truth, for humanity? One of the most pitiful things the stars look down

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upon is a young man with fine gifts, with strength, with love, with genius, able to do some noble work, yet wasting all his possibilities in some form of debased living.

Strength is God's gift and should be used only in worthy ways; to use it in any unworthy way is sacrilege. The device of a French admiral was a burning and flaming oar, as a sign of his fervent and zealous activity on the sea for his king and his country. Underneath the oar was the motto: "For another—No." While he was ready always to gird himself to fight for his country, he was not ready to do battle for any other cause. Dora Greenwell has written these lines on this motto:

*I gird me not for every cause,
I answer not to every call,
I do not wear my heart for daws
To peck, nor weep when sparrows fall.*

*But when I give, I give my all;
For her my love, for him my friend,
My steel, my gold, my life, I spend.*

“ Because We Are Strong ”

*My sword shall flash, my blood shall flow
For these, but for another—No !*

*Show me but cause for quarrel strong,
That arms the right against the wrong,
That bids me battle with the brave
To crush the tyrant, free the slave ;*

*Then through the wave I winged will fly,
Will cleave with oars the yielding sky,
Will flame through ocean, float through air,
Will all things suffer, do, and dare.
For friend I love, for cause I know,
I fight. But for aught other—No.*

This is a splendid motto for young men —“For another—No!” They have superb strength, God’s wonderful gift to them. Let them not waste it in sin, nor squander it in uselessness of any kind. Let it not wither and shrivel away, wrapped up in any napkins of non-use. It is sacred, this marvelous strength that hides in our hands, in our brain, in our heart; it is part of God’s own life given to us. It is divine. It should be used only in ways that will honor God. We

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should not answer every call to pour out our strength, nor draw our sword in every cause. We should keep our life sacred for our Master and for the cause that is dear to him. Dr. Guthrie was fond of saying:

*I live for those who love me,
For those who know me true,
For the heaven that bends above me,
And the good that I can do;
For the wrongs that need resistance,
For the cause that lacks assistance,
For the future in the distance,
And the good that I can do.*

We are exhorted continually in the Scriptures to be strong. Christ is strong and we are to be like him. We need to be strong in order to stand firm and true in the midst of the fray of life, and to do our duty faithfully and worthily. But how can we be strong? We need the strength of heaven in our arm to make us equal to the stress of duty and responsibility that we must meet. How can we get this strength?

“ Because We Are Strong ”

One way is by prayer. Prayer is linking our little life to God, when his grace will flow into our weakness, and make it God's strength. If we would be strong, we must pray.

*“ Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in thy presence will avail to make !*

* * * * *

*We kneel, how weak ! We rise, how full of power !
Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others, that we are not always strong,
That we are ever overborne with care,
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled—when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with thee ?”*

Another secret of strength is found in fellowship, companionship, with Christ. Moses knew this secret, for it is said of him that “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” We grievously wrong ourselves when we do not accept the help of Christ in our tasks and struggles. Even in a strong human friend we may find inspiration and help which will make our lives mean more, stimulating us to

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bravery and fidelity and enabling us to be victorious. The other day a friend travelled ten miles to be helped through a terrible temptation. "If I can only sit here a few minutes and have you make a prayer with me and say a strong word of cheer, I shall not fall." Even a human presence often carries one through danger and makes one strong to overcome. Infinitely more is the presence of Christ to us when we are weak.

It is told of the widow of Schumann, the musical composer, that whenever she was going to play any of her husband's music in public, she would read over some of his old letters to her, written in the lover days. Thus, she said, his very life seemed to fill and possess her, and she was better able then to interpret his work. If we will read over Christ's words of love to us until his life enters into us, and his spirit breathes itself into our lives, then we can be brave and strong in resisting evil and doing his will.

The Glasses You Wear

*“Lord, when I look on high,
Clouds only meet my sight ;
Fears deepen with the night ;
But yet it is thy sky.
Help me to trust thee, then, I pray,
Wait in the dark and tearfully obey.”*

CHAPTER TWENTIETH

The Glasses You Wear



MOST people one meets these days wear glasses. Is it because there is an increasing number of defective eyes? or it is because the advance in scientific knowledge of the eye reveals the defects, making it apparent that almost no one has perfect organs of vision? It is well at least that our doctors know so well how to take care of our eyes and to overcome our manifold infirmities of vision.

It is very important if we are to see well, if our eyes are to do honest work for us, that we wear the right kind of glasses. Some people do not, and therefore fail to see things clearly. They think the trouble is with the objects they look at, that they are warped or out of proportion, whereas the fault is in the lenses through which they look. There

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is a story of a man to whom everything appeared crooked or distorted. He was not aware of it himself, but thought things really were just as they appeared to him to be. He did not imagine that he was missing so much beauty through the fault of his glasses, and kept on wearing them without seeking for anything better. One day he was visiting at a neighbor's house and idly picked up a pair of glasses that lay on a table and put them on. To his amazement, everything seemed different. He looked at people, and their faces were bright and clear. He looked at the furniture of the room, and it was graceful and regular—it had appeared almost grotesque before as his glasses showed it to him. He looked at the pictures on the wall, and for the first time saw their beauty. He walked out of doors, and the trees, which heretofore he had seen only in vague, gnarled form, appeared beautiful. He learned now that by using his defective glasses he had been missing a large part of the pleasure of seeing. He quickly bought a pair of glasses

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that suited his eyes, and all the world became new to him.

There are many people who are wearing a wrong kind of glasses. There are some, for instance, who never see beauty in any other person. All characters are distorted to them. They see only the faults, the imperfections, the blemishes of people's lives. Even the noblest and best people, falling under their eyes, fail to reveal any features that are winsome and attractive. They never have a word of commendation for any piece of work anyone else does, or for any act. Only yesterday, one tried for half an hour to get a visitor to say a pleasant word about something or somebody, but tried in vain. A number of persons were referred to in the attempt to elicit at least a word of commendation or approval, but in every case the response was harsh, critical, unkindly, censorious, sometimes almost venomous. Many generous and worthy acts were mentioned, to see if some beautiful deed would not win a cordial and kindly word, but in every instance

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something was suggested that took away from the apparent beauty or worthiness of the acts. This person sadly needed a pair of new glasses.

Far more than we know does this matter of eyes or no eyes make our world for us. We are in the midst of most glorious things all the while, but some of us see nothing and miss all the inspiration that would mean so much to us if only our eyes were opened. We talk of a lost Paradise, but there is still a Paradise for those who can see it. George Macdonald says: "I suspect we shall find some day that the loss of the human paradise consists chiefly in the closing of the human eyes; that at least far more of it than people think remains about us still, only we are so filled with foolish desires and evil cares that we cannot see or hear, cannot even smell or taste, the pleasant things around us."

There is a little book called "Eyes and No Eyes," which tells of two boys who one day went out for a walk together. When they came back, a friend asked one of them what

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he had seen. He said he had seen nothing. He had been travelling through dust and along rough paths, but he had not seen anything beautiful or interesting in all the two hours' walk. When the other boy was asked the same question, he replied with much enthusiasm, telling of a hundred beautiful things he had seen in his walk—in the fields and in the woods,—flowers and plants and bits of landscape, birds and squirrels and rippling streams. The two boys had walked together over the same path, and while one had seen nothing to give him pleasure, the other came back with his mind full of lovely images and bright recollections. Both had looked on the same objects, from the same points of view, but they had looked through different lenses.

There always are two classes of people among those who journey together—those with eyes which see and those who, having eyes, see nothing. There are many people who never see the stars, nor the hills, nor the blue sky, nor the flowers, nor any beauty in plant or

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tree or living creature. A story is told of Turner, the artist, who stood one day with a lady before one of his great paintings. The visitor looked a long time at the picture and then said, "Mr. Turner, I cannot see those things in nature." Looking at her thoughtfully, he replied, "Don't you wish you could, madam?"

Many of us who see nothing lovely in the objects about us wish we could see what others see. There is a way of learning to do it. We should train ourselves to make use of our eyes. Every child should be taught from its earliest youth to observe, to see beauty wherever beauty exists. This is part of the new education for young children. They are encouraged to look intently at all things about them, so that they can give an intelligent account of whatever they have seen. This training should be carried into all the life, so that we shall miss nothing of the profuse and wondrous loveliness that is everywhere in our Father's world. The result of not using our eyes is that by and by we have no eyes

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—the faculty that is not exercised becomes atrophied.

Still more to be pitied than those who have eyes and see not, are those who see things distorted, through warped lenses, through untrue glasses. We should train ourselves to see only what is lovely. An old legend of Jesus tells that while the disciples one day turned away with loathing from the carcass of a dead dog by the wayside, the Master looked at it and said to the disciples, "What beautiful teeth the creature has!" Too many of us see only the things that are loathsome and have no vision for anything that is winsome.

A lady took her visitor to a window to show her a view which to her was very inspiring. The guest manifested almost disgust as she exclaimed that all she saw was an unusually fine lot of black chimneys and smoky back-buildings. The genial hostess said, cheerfully, "Why, I never saw the chimneys and back-buildings before. I saw only the hills yonder and that fringe of noble trees on the

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horizon!" This woman got far more out of life than her friend did, for she had eyes for the beauty and grandeur of the world about her, while the other saw only the things that were homely and without beauty.

The same is true of the men and women about us, as well as of the scenes and conditions. It would add immeasurably to our pleasure in life if we would train ourselves to look for whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, in the people about us, instead of for the blemishes and faults. If we wore the glasses of love and charity, it would be in this way that we should see everyone and everyone's work. What a change it would make for us in the world of people if we should some day put on these new glasses and look at others through them!

The aspect of all life's events and experiences would also be changed if we wore the right kind of glasses. To many persons life has nothing bright. It is made up chiefly of things which produce discontent, complain-

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ing, and fault-finding. We all know people who never have a really bright word to say about their own life and its circumstances. To them everything seems wrong. They exaggerate their trials and see a calamity in every smallest mishap. They see nothing bright in any outlook. They enumerate their troubles and sorrows with glib tongue, and even when their joys and happinesses are referred to, find flecks in them. If they could in some way change their glasses, so that they would see things in the light of Christian faith and trust, all things would be transformed for them.

What we all need, in order that we may see people and things as they are, is a heart of love. If we could see through Christ's eyes, everything would be attractive to our vision. We can get the new glasses, with their magical power, only by getting into our hearts the mind that is in Christ Jesus—the mind of love, of patience, of trust, of joy, of peace.

*“Grant us, O Lord, the grace to bear
The little pricking thorn ;*

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*The hasty word that seems unfair ;
The twang of truths well worn ;
The jest which makes our weakness plain ;
The darling plan o'ertuned ;
The careless touch upon our pain ;
The slight we have not earned ;
The rasp of care, dear Lord, to-day,
Lest all these fretting things
Make needless grief, oh, give, we pray,
The heart that trusts and sings."*

The fault of Over-sensitiveness

*In all thy humors, whether grave or mellow,
Thou'rt such a touchy, testy, pleasant fellow,
Hast so much wit and mirth and spleen about thee,
There is no living with thee, nor without thee.*

—“SPECTATOR.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIRST

The Fault of Over-sensitiveness



SOME people make a good deal of needless suffering for themselves and others by their over-sensitiveness. They appear to be always watching for words or tones in the conversation of others which may in some way reflect upon them or may allude with a suggestion of blame or criticism to something they have said or done. We all know people whose extreme sensitiveness keeps us continually, and in an uncomfortable way, on our guard when we are in their presence. We have to be always most careful what we say lest in some way we vex them or give them pain. It is part of love's duty never to say a word which would cause another any hurt feeling. There is too much thoughtless speaking which wounds hearts. It is part of the lesson of thoughtfulness to learn to min-

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gle with people of all sorts and yet never touch a tender spot, never give pain to a gentle heart. This is not easy. It requires almost infinite tact to do it.

It is true that some people seem never to learn this part of the lesson of thoughtfulness. They have a genius for hurting others. They are continually saying things which give sting and pain, referring to unwelcome subjects and bringing up matters which tend to exasperate or irritate. They seem to walk with heavy boots among the most delicate flowers of feeling as if they were treading on rocks. It is to be expected that we shall learn love's lessons better than this. Thoughtfulness is one of the finest qualities in a well-disciplined life. It regards the comfort and happiness of others before its own. In conversation it is always careful not to refer to things which would cause pain. It never alludes to a man's physical defects. It respects your sorrow and refrains from rudely touching your wound. Cardinal Newman defined a gentleman as one who never by word

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or act gives pain to another. This is Christian love's ideal.

But the sensitive person also has a duty in the case—a duty of not showing hurt feeling too readily, of bearing his pain quietly, even if others are thoughtless. For, gentle as we may be, it is practically impossible to avoid everything that may cause pain to a tender heart. The most thoughtful person will some time unintentionally speak a word that will hurt.

A noble spirit will learn to suffer from the thoughtlessness, even from the rudeness of others, and yet be still. No doubt extreme sensitiveness is a fault. Ofttimes, however, the cause of it is at least partly physical and in a sense therefore it is involuntary. The nerves lie so near the surface that they are exposed to every touch. Sensitive people suffer greatly. One who is less delicately organized gets more happiness out of life, for unpleasant, disagreeable things do not affect him so painfully.

But the cause of sensitiveness is not always

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physical. Some people allow themselves to be hurt by every kind of expression which is not quite to their mind. They have refined tastes, and rudeness offends them. They are scholarly in their speech, and they are pained by violations of the rules of grammar and rhetoric. They are accustomed to the conventional ways of polite society, and bitterly resent whatever to them seems to be vulgar. They have no patience with those whose manner or whose personality in any way offends them. Such people will never get much comfort from others until they are cured in some way of their extreme sensitiveness.

There are two ways of meeting qualities and habits in others which pain us or would naturally irritate or vex us. We may be mastered by them, or we may get the mastery over them. No one can live long in this world and find all things precisely to his taste. We may as well learn first as last that we cannot bring all people to our way of thinking or to our idea of the proprieties or amenities of life. If we would get along

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sweetly and happily with all those we must meet in our daily rounds, we shall have to do at least our share of the yielding and self-denying. Instead of getting everybody to become agreeable and pleasing to us, we shall have to get over our fastidiousness, and our love will have to learn to be blind to many things that are not beautiful in others and deaf to many things that naturally grate upon our ears and are offensive to our taste. We must be agreeable and sweet ourselves, whether others are exactly pleasing to us or not.

The law of love teaches us to look upon all men as our brothers and to treat them with consideration. Love is the best cure for the sensitiveness that is offended by lack of culture or refinement in others. Some of the best people in the world have homely manners and are ignorant of the conventionalities of society. Love must be large enough to overlook all such things, and to see the man back of the plain garb.

There is another kind of sensitiveness that is

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still more unreasonable. Men call it touchiness. It is like an exposed sore which is always being hurt. There are people who seem to be ever on the watch for slights, and they are always finding them, too, or imagining them. The utmost thoughtfulness cannot avoid saying things which wound them, for they exaggerate everything unpleasant and imagine unkindly intention when none was dreamed of. They flush and show grieved feeling at the slightest questioning of their infallibility. If anyone expresses a different opinion from theirs on the subject they at once resent it, become piqued and hurt, making it a personal matter. They can never calmly discuss a matter *pro* and *con* with another, for they will not tolerate any objection to their views, or any opinion that differs from theirs.

Such sensitiveness makes life hard, not less for one's friends than for one's self. It indicates a most unwholesome spirit, anything but beautiful, far from being sweet and winning. Those who become aware of their

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weakness in this regard should set to work at once to get rid of their unseemly burden and burdensomeness.

There are several considerations which may help in the cure of this weakness. One is the fact that exhibitions of hurt feeling are most unseemly. When we see them in others we know how they appear also in us. They are childish and unworthy of anyone who is much past the years of infancy. We may excuse and tolerate touchiness in a very young child, but in a full-grown man it is altogether unpardonable. Proper self-respect should make it impossible for anyone to permit such unseemliness in his conduct. We should be ashamed of anything so unworthy, so unbeautiful in our disposition and behavior.

Another motive for the avoidance of such displays is that they give pain to others. This is one of the infirmities which make friendship hard. One of the comforts of true friendship is that we do not need to be always on our guard lest we give offence. A generous, confiding nature should not be pained

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by any treatment. Perfect love loves unto the uttermost. It overlooks and forgives and never fails. One who is touchy and ready to be hurt by the slightest allusion or by any seeming neglect makes entire freedom and confidence in friendship impossible.

Another help in getting rid of over-sensitiveness is to remember that such a spirit is not Christian. It is in violation of the whole catalogue of qualities which are lovely. We cannot witness worthily for Christ unless we master it. We cannot conceive of our Master as being touchy and sensitive.

In trying to overcome this infirmity a good habit is to cultivate indifference to unpleasant things in others about us, to ignore their existence. When certain worthless fellows failed to show King Saul proper honor after his choice as king, we are told that "he held his peace." The meaning is that he was deaf to their insults. This is a good way to bear ourselves toward all unkindness—to ignore it, to pay no attention to it, to act as if it had not happened. A deaf man said he had com-

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pensation for his deafness in the fact that there were so many silly and foolish things said which he did not have to hear. We shall save ourselves from much hurt feeling if we will be as if we were deaf.

As If We Did Not

*There's so much bad in the best of us,
And so much good in the worst of us,
That it scarcely behooves any of us,
To talk about the rest of us.*

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

*Alas, how easily things go wrong,
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain,
And life is never the same again.
Alas, how hardly things go right
'Tis hard to watch in a summer night,
For the sigh will come, and the kiss will stay,
And the summer night is a winter day.*

—GEORGE MACDONALD.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SECOND

As If We Did Not



HERE are some things we would better not know. Or, if we do know them, we would better be as though we did not know them. We should never pry into other people's matters. We should respect every other man's individuality. Some people are always seeking to know others' private affairs. It is the worst kind of impertinence to try to do this. But sometimes there are things told to us voluntarily in confidence, and of these we may not speak. To some people, however, a secret is a heavy burden. They go about "dying to tell," and yet they dare not tell. In some cases, however, keeping the secret proves impossible and the thing is told—told, of course, as a secret, only to certain trusted persons. But confidence has been violated, and the bearer of

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the burden has failed of entire loyalty and honor.

It would have been a great deal better if this betrayer of another's confidence had regarded himself as not knowing the thing which by the grace of his friend he had come to know. It would have been better still, of course, if he really never had learned it. He had no right to hear it. He heard it only through the weakness of another. It is an unkindness to many people to ask them to be the custodians of secrets which they are not allowed to divulge. It is placing them in a position in which they cannot but suffer. It is subjecting them to a temptation which it is very hard for them to resist. We have no right to lay such a burden on any friend. Besides, if what we tell is something which ought not to be told, we have no right to tell it even to one person.

But when another has been weak and has told us something which we are charged to repeat to no other being in the world, what is our duty? We may say, "Well, if my friend can

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trust me with this matter, there can be no harm in my trusting another friend with it." But the failure of another to be true to himself and perfectly honorable will never excuse us for failing in the same way. Our duty can be nothing less than the most sacred keeping of the secret confided to us. It is not ours to divulge to anyone. We should consider ourselves as not having heard it at all.

Of course, we cannot work any sort of magic on ourselves by which the bit of knowledge communicated to us shall be literally taken out of our memory and be as a lost word to us thenceforward. Some people seem to have memories out of which knowledge once possessed does vanish so completely that it cannot be found again. But usually it is not great secrets which have been whispered into the ear with solemn adjurations, which get lost out of memory. The things people forget most easily are likely to be things of value, important facts, useful information, things they ought to remember. It should

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be possible, however, to forget in the same way matters which we do not need to remember, which it is better we do not remember.

We should train ourselves to forget people's faults. We are told that God does not remember the sins of his people. His forgiveness obliterates even the memory of the evil things we have done. Of course there is a sense in which God cannot forget, but the meaning is that he remembers as if he remembered not. We do not usually forget our brother's faults and follies. Nor are they before our minds as if they were not. On the other hand, they are likely to be kept very much in evidence. One of the Beatitudes is, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." If we remember the wrong things we see in others how can we expect God not to remember the greater wrong things his pure eye sees in us?

There are matters of knowledge of others which come to us in an accidental way which also should be to us as if we do not know them. Sometimes we are compelled to over-

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hear words which were not meant for our ears, which no one supposes we have heard. The other day a friend wrote of being witness unintentionally of something which, if spoken of to others, would have led to very serious censure of the persons concerned. Advice was asked. What should this friend do with the unwelcome knowledge? There can be only one answer to such a question. Things learned in any accidental way, when it was not intended that we should know of them, we are to consider ourselves as not knowing at all. There is no other honorable course. It is bad enough to divulge something which has been told us by another in great confidence, under charge of secrecy; but it is far worse to speak to anyone of things we have learned in a purely accidental way, which we have no right to know.

There are things told us sometimes of others, evil stories perhaps, things which affect the good name of the persons. These stories may be the result of miserable gossip. They may be altogether false, gross misrepresentations.

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In this case we certainly make ourselves sharers in the sin of the original maligners if we repeat the stories to anyone. He who helps give wings to a scandal is himself a miserable scandalmonger. But supposing that the stories are true, what is our duty concerning them? Have we not a right to tell others evil things about a person when we have verified the stories? What gives us the right to do this? What makes it our duty to spread an evil report even when we know it to be true? Clearly, whatever the case may be, the Christian way to deal with such matters, in whatever manner they may have come to our ears, is to be as if we did not know them.

There is still another class of things we cannot help knowing, which it were well if we would consider ourselves as not knowing. Sometimes we have unpleasant experiences with people. They speak of us injuriously or treat us unkindly. Sometimes the hurt they do us is from want of thought, not from want of heart. There is no intention to in-

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jure us or to cause us trouble or pain—it is the result of thoughtlessness. Sometimes indeed it may be an unkind spirit in those about us which leads them to seek to vex us. In either case, it is not easy to endure the irritation which we cannot but suffer.

Here again there is a secret worth knowing, which, understood, takes away much of the suffering and enables us to go through the experience quietly and patiently. There is a way of forgetting such hurts, which takes from them in a great measure their power to do us real injury. A boat ploughs its way through the water of the silver lake, but in a little while the water is as smooth as ever again, retaining no trace of the rude cleaving. One would not know the glassy waters had ever been ruffled. If we can learn the lake's lesson, it will add greatly not only to the quiet and beauty of our lives, but also to our own comfort. Whatever we may suffer from the unkindness or thoughtlessness of others, or from the uncongeniality of our environment, we shall not be disturbed or distressed.

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This is one of the blessings of Christian peace. We hide away in Christ, in the shelter of his love, in the secret of his presence, and there find refuge from the plottings of men and from the strife of tongues. The things which otherwise would cause us great suffering do not touch us. We meet them as though they were not. In the shelter of the love of Christ nothing harms us. We are so sustained that it is as though the trials had no existence.

Making a Good Name

*Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,
Is the immediate jewel of their souls :
Who steals my purse steals trash ; 'tis something,
nothing ;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands ;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.*

—SHAKESPEARE.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THIRD

Making a Good Name



THE name includes the character. All that a man is his name stands for and represents. A baby has no character, and at first its name means nothing. It has done nothing to give it individuality in anyone's mind. But as the child grows toward manhood, the name every year grows to mean more and more. All the story of the childhood, the youth and the early years goes into it. In school and college, the boy's name to all who know him stands for whatever he is. If he is well-behaved, bright, interesting, with good disposition and a good record, a good student, gentlemanly, refined—his name will suggest all this wherever it is heard. If he is negligent in his habits, careless in his life, if he is rude, ungentlemanly, if he is untrue, resentful, quick-tempered, the men-

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tion of his name will bring up all these qualities to those who know him intimately.

The making of a name is, therefore, a matter of the highest importance. We are told that reputation is what people think about a man, what they suppose he is, and that character is what the man really is; but ultimately reputation and character are one. For a while, a man may hide his true self and may pass for something better than he really is, but in the end character will assert itself through all disguises and all illusions, and the man's name will represent precisely what the man is.

Holy Scripture tells us that a good name is better than precious ointment. It is the perfume of the ointment that is suggested, and the thought is very beautiful. In a parable of spiritual life, in one of the Minor Prophets, one feature is expressed thus, "His smell is as Lebanon." One of Saint Paul's "whatsoevers," in a wonderful epitome of Christly character is, "whatsoever things are of good report." There is an aroma that belongs to

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every life which is the composite product of the things that are said about the person along the years. If all that is said is good, favorable, commendatory of the person's name, the report is like sweet perfume. Some men live beautifully, sweetly, patiently, unselfishly, helpfully, sympathetically, speaking only good words, never rash, intemperate, unloving words, walking among men carefully, humbly, reverently; and the odor of their lives is like that of Mary's ointment which filled all the house. Other men are ruled by self, or by the world, or by greed, or by desire for pleasure; they are of the earth, earthy, or they are untrue, resentful, unloving, of hasty speech—we all know what the effluence of such lives is, not like gentle fragrance, but unsavory, of an evil odor.

There is something very mysterious about perfume. No one can describe it. You cannot take a photograph of it. You cannot weigh it. Yet it is a very essential quality of the flower. The same is true of that strange thing we call influence. Influence is the

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aroma of a life. The most important thing about your life is this subtle, imponderable, indefinable, mysterious quality of your personality which is known as influence. This is really all of you that counts in its final impression upon other lives. No matter how a man may pose, how much he may profess, how he may assert himself—what kind of man he may claim to be—that which he really is, is what breathes out from his life wherever he is known, that which his name suggests to people wherever it is spoken.

Lebanon's gardens and trees and fruits filled all the region round about with delicious fragrance. Every Christian life ought to be fragrant, with a smell like that of Lebanon. But there is only one way to make it so. Men gather the perfume from acres of roses and it fills only a little vial. Our influence, the perfume of our lives, is gathered from all the acres of our years—all that has grown upon those acres during all those years. If it is to be like the essence of ten thousand roses, sweet, pure, undefiled, our life must be

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all well watched, clean, pure, holy, loving, true. The evil, as well as the good, is gathered, and helps to make the total of the influence of our lives.

We all know how easily one's influence is hurt, how little follies and indiscretions in one's conduct or behavior take away from the sweetness of one's reputation. The author of Ecclesiastes says, "Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor; so doth a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor." We need to think seriously of this matter of dead flies. We are not always careful enough about keeping them out. There are many men, good in the general tenor of their lives, godly, prayerful, consistent in larger ways, but the perfume of whose names is rendered unsavory by little dead flies in the ointment of their common life. They are not careful to keep their word, they are not prompt in paying their debts, they are not watchful of their speech, they are not loyal in their friendships, they are indiscreet in their relations with others, they are wanting

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in refinement or courtesy, they are rash in their speech, they are resentful—we know how many of these dead flies there are which cause the ointment of some good people's names to send forth an unsavory odor.

We need to watch our lives in the smallest matters if we would keep our names sweet wherever we are known. Influence is most important. It is our mightiest force for good or for evil. Let us keep it pure and good for Christ, and in order to do this let us keep Christ always in it.

The end is not in this world. Our name at the close of earthly life enshrines the essence of all that men know about us. But there is much that is beautiful and good in a true and worthy life that men do not know. It is interesting to think of the name as at last including all that the person has done, all the influences that have ever gone forth from the life. We are told that in nature nothing is ever wasted. Matter changes its form, but not a particle of it is lost. Wood is consumed in the fire, and the elements of which

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it was composed are separated—some of them escaping into the air in gases and some of them remaining in the residuum of ashes,—but not the smallest particle that was in the tree has really perished. We live our life in this world, our few years or many, and then cease to be. The places which have known us will know us no more. But not the smallest element of our life is lost. The things we have done, the words we have spoken, the influences we have sent out, all have taken their place in other lives and have been built into them like blocks of stone on the wall of a building.

We may believe that as in nature so in human life, not the smallest particle is ever wasted. Many things we try to do seem to fail. At least, they do not realize our desire and intention. We grieve as if the efforts had accomplished nothing. But some day we shall see that no true purpose ever has failed, that though our efforts may not all have realized what we hoped from them, yet in the unseen realm, where the true results of life are all

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gathered and treasured, we shall find all our hopes and dreams, all our good intentions that could not be fulfilled here, all our plans and purposes that we had not the strength to carry out in this world. Ofttimes we are defeated in our efforts to do good. We begin many things which we cannot complete. There is not a day when we live as well as we wanted to live or meant to live. We do no piece of work as beautifully as we wished and intended to do it.

But the man whom Christ will present some day with exceeding joy before God will be the man with all the fruits and harvests of his life garnered, nothing lost by the way. This truth should give us measureless comfort as we think of our failures here and the dropping off of so many blossoms without any earthly fruiting. Browning puts this finely:

*All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall
exist;*

*Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good,
nor power*

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*Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for
the melodist*

*When eternity affirms the conception of an
hour.*

*The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth
too hard,*

*The passion that left the ground to lose itself in
the sky,*

*The music sent up to God by the lover and the
bard ;*

*Enough that he heard it once ; we shall hear it by-
and-by.*

Not all of anyone's life is gathered in this world in even the most fragrant name. A thousand good things which the man has done have been forgotten. Countless gentle deeds were wrought so quietly that no one ever heard of them. Then only God could know the things which took no form in either word or deed—the love, the sympathy, the gentle thoughtfulness, the self-denials, the prayers for others and for the kingdom of Christ, the aspirations, the desires to do good. It is only a little of any noble life that the world ever

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knows. But God knows all and remembers all, and the names of his saints will at last represent all the story of their lives, with nothing good or beautiful wanting.

Letting Things Run Down

*“What, here so soon?
Sunset and night?
Why, I have work to do that needs the noon,
And day’s broad light!
See! On the palette, there, the colors are but set,
The canvas still unwet
And it is night.*

*“How sweet ’twould be,
My work all done—
To sit at eve, my threshold on, and see
Stars, one by one,
Flash into the dark heaven! Oh, happy rest!
My folded hands, how blest
But—’tis already night.”*

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOURTH

Letting Things Run Down



IT is easy to let things run down. We begin carefully, but presently lapse into carelessness. A child's copy-book is apt to show reasonably fair following of the copy in the top lines, and then the farther down the page the worse. An old adage has it that a new broom sweeps clean, implying that as it gets older it does not do its work so well. This tendency from good to less good, from watchfulness to neglect, is not confined, however, to such inanimate instruments as brooms. The disposition is human and very common, if not almost universal.

Eternal vigilance is the price of other things besides liberty. Nothing but intense watchfulness will save us from the tendency to let things run down, whether in our personal

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The furniture is not dusted as it used to be. The children are not so carefully dressed as they used to be. All about the house the lessening interest shows, too, without and within. The grounds are not kept neat and attractive as they used to be. Gates, fences, and outbuildings have a tumble-down appearance. Inside, walls, carpets, curtains, and furniture begin to have a neglected look. The whole air of the place has changed. The home is running down.

We find the same tendency also oftentimes in people. It manifests itself in many ways. It may be in personal habits. There are those who used to be almost fastidious in their appearance. Even though unable to wear the finest clothes, they always dressed in the best taste. But now signs of slovenliness show that there has been a relaxing of the old carefulness. There is not the same neatness and winningness as of old, not the same attention to personal appearance. In little ways the change is noted at first, but it gradually becomes more marked.

Letting Things Run Down

In people's personal lives, too, the same tendency often becomes apparent. We are apt to allow ourselves to slacken our diligence in our work. Especially is this true when our tasks are the same over and over, the old routine every day. It is hard to keep up the zest and interest with this everlasting repetition—in the home, in the office, or in the shop. It is very easy after doing the same things a thousand times, to do them a little less painstakingly. In the care of the body, too, great watchfulness is required to avoid becoming neglectful. An old man of ninety said it had not taken half the energy for him to do the great tasks and to meet the large responsibilities of his long life that it had for him to brush his teeth three times a day, year after year, and never once neglect it nor do it carelessly. It requires an unusual energy and persistence for a mechanic to do his work as conscientiously year after year as he did at the beginning.

In the moralities it is not less difficult to keep up to tone. We set out determined to make

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the most of our life. We fix our standard high. We intend to live in all ways worthily, pleasing God. We begin well, and for a time are conscientious and faithful. We resist temptation and are loyal to our Master in the smallest things. We are diligent in the performance of all our duties. We cultivate the spirit of love in our relations with others, and strive to be patient, thoughtful, kind, helpful to all about us. We endeavor to live for the higher things, putting character above pleasure or self-indulgence, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.

But too often we grow weary in well-doing and slacken our diligence. We are not so conscientious as we were about our daily prayer and Bible-reading. We are more easily interrupted or hindered in our devotional habits. We keep a less vigilant watch over our tongues, and sometimes speak words that are not true, or that are unkind and uncharitable. We let the reins slip from our hands, allowing our temper to run wild, hurting gentle lives and bringing shame upon

Letting Things Run Down

ourselves. We grow remiss in our religious activities, dropping tasks and withdrawing from responsibilities. It is easy thus to allow our lives to run down in their moralities. The only way to prevent this unhappy tendency in any department of life is to watch against the smallest beginnings of neglect or inattention. Our lives must be kept up to tone at every point. The musician has his piano tuned frequently, that its strings may not fall below concert pitch. An artist kept some highly colored stones in his studio and said it was to keep his eye up to tone. We need continually to keep before us high ideals, lofty standards, for if our ideals and standards are lowered, our attainments will be lowered too.

One of the effects of mingling with people is that we allow ourselves to be influenced by their example and to become tolerant of imperfection, of failure, of neglect in ourselves. The Christian needs always to keep Christ before his eye, that by his perfect life he may be inspired to do his best. One of the

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reasons for daily Bible reading is that by its heavenly teachings we may be kept continually in mind of what we ought to be and what we ought to do.

*“And often for your comfort you will read the guide
and chart ;*

*It has wisdom for the mind and sweet solace for
the heart ;*

*It will serve you as a mentor, it will guide you sure
and straight*

*All the time that you will journey, be the ending
soon or late.”*





